

A CASE STUDY ON HIRAM JOHNSON HIGH SCHOOL OPERATION COLLEGE

Kevin McCarty  
B.A., California State University, Long Beach, 1995

THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of  
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION

at

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

FALL  
2011

A CASE STUDY ON HIRAM JOHNSON HIGH SCHOOL OPERATION COLLEGE

A Thesis

by

Kevin McCarty

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Committee Chair  
Robert W. Wassmer, Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_, Second Reader  
Mary K. Kirlin, D.P.A.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Student: Kevin McCarty

I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this thesis is suitable for shelving in the Library and credit is to be awarded for the thesis.

\_\_\_\_\_, Department Chair \_\_\_\_\_  
Robert W. Wassmer, Ph.D. Date

Department of Public Policy and Administration

Abstract  
of  
A CASE STUDY ON HIRAM JOHNSON HIGH SCHOOL OPERATION COLLEGE  
by  
Kevin McCarty

Some high schools in California have high rates of sending their graduating seniors on to college. Conversely, other high schools, especially in lower income, urban areas, have much lower rates of success. This thesis is a case study of a four-year (2006-2010) pilot project launched at the urban, lower income Sacramento Hiram Johnson High School with a goal of assisting more high school seniors apply and transition to college.

In the case study, I outline some research on impediments to and remedies for college-going rates at lower income, urban high schools. With regard to the case study, I outlined demographics and academic achievements at Hiram Johnson High School. In the Operation College case study, I evaluated the pilot project based upon metrics for success outlined at the launch of the effort in 2006.

Lastly, upon evaluating the data collected relative to the initial goals of Operation College and interviewing key stakeholders, I found that the pilot project did in fact illustrate success in meeting their narrowly defined goals at the onset of the project.

\_\_\_\_\_, Committee Chair  
Robert W. Wassmer, Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my CSU Sacramento Public Policy and Administration faculty during my graduate studies; Christy Jensen, Bob Waste, David DeLuz, Rob Wassmer, Peter Detwiler, Miguel Ceja and Mary Kirlin. As a working professional in public policy and politics, I continue to utilize the skills and insight I gained through this graduate program.

With regard to the Master's thesis project, I would like to specifically thank Rob Wassmer and Mary Kirlin for overseeing my work. Further, I would like to acknowledge the great partners with whom I worked on Hiram Johnson High School Operation College; Chris Stevens, Lynne Tafoya, Mike Crosby, Sheila Sidqe, Maria Alvarez, Nancy Anton, Chris Woods, Miguel Ceja and Anna Vue.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for always supporting me to pursue a higher education. My father Elliott D. McCarty and my late mother Barbara J. McCarty always encouraged me to both pursue an advanced degree and never stop learning. My wife Leticia, who supported and encouraged me to begin and finish my graduate studies. Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to my daughters, Victoria and Barbara, who inspire me to work hard and make a difference.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgments.....	v
List of Tables .....	viii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.....	1
High School Counselors: Impact on College Attendance.....	1
Background on Hiram Johnson High School (HJHS) .....	2
Background on HJHS Operation College.....	5
Evaluation and Case Study of HJHS Operation College .....	6
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
What is a College-Going Culture?.....	10
Challenges to Attaining College Information for Low-SES Communities .....	14
Remedies to Increase College Information for Those Generally Left Behind When it Comes to College Access.....	17
3. DESCRIPTION OF HIRAM JOHNSON SCHOOL OPERATION: COLLEGE: HOW IT STARTED AND WHAT THE GOALS WERE.....	21
HJHS Operation College Launch – Summer 2006.....	25
Evaluation Plan .....	30
4. RESULTS.....	32
Quantitative Results .....	32
Qualitative Results .....	38

5. CONCLUSION .....	46
Case Study Recap .....	46
Challenges with Research and Findings .....	47
General Observations.....	50
State Implications.....	52
Concluding Thoughts.....	53
References.....	54

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
1. Table 1 Hiram Johnson High School Demographic Comparison .....	3
2. Table 2 2010 API Scores .....	4
3. Table 3 Percentages of High School Graduates Meeting UC/CSU Course Requirements .....	5
4. Table 4 Percentages of Total U.S. Job Opportunities Based upon Years of Education by Year .....	10
5. Table 5 Nine Elements of a College-Going Culture .....	12
6. Table 6 Students Completing Financial Aid Applications via the FAFSA/Cal Grant Program .....	34
7. Table 7 Student College Applications to Higher Education Institutions .....	35
8. Table 8 Juniors and Seniors Taking College Placement Exams .....	36
9. Table 9 Families Participating on College Information Nights .....	37
10. Table 10 Students Participation with A-G Courses .....	38



## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this Master's thesis is to offer a qualitative and quantitative case study to evaluate the effectiveness of a four-year local Sacramento effort to improve a high school's college-going culture and successfully send more high school students to college. As a newly elected Councilmember of the City of Sacramento in 2005, I worked to establish this effort, formally titled "Hiram Johnson High School (HJHS) Operation College," which will be referred to as Operation College in the remainder of this study. This thesis critically explores the methods used and the success of this four-year effort, which officially commenced in the summer of 2006 and terminated in 2010 at an urban public high school located in southeast Sacramento, California. The Operation College program produced well-documented early results in 2007; however, this case study analysis provides a more thorough quantitative and qualitative analysis of the project.

The next sections of this introduction chapter include an overview of college-going rates and societal and community impact; background on Hiram Johnson High School (HJHS); an overview of what Operation College is; and, lastly, an outline of how this thesis will evaluate the success of Operation College.

#### High School Counselors: Impact on College Attendance

Students most likely to be influenced by their high school counselor about college opportunities rather than by their family members are often the students least likely to have access to adequate high school counselor services (McDonough, 2005). Chapter 2,

the literature review, outlines the direct impact of college counseling and preparation on actual college-going rates. However, the generalization exists that gaps exist in underserved urban high schools related to providing adequate guidance on the college process. This premise was the basis for the creation of the HJHS Operation College—a project created with a goal of increasing student access to counselors to help foster a better college culture among lower income, minority students.

Further, increased higher education rates for students in the Hiram Johnson High School attendance area could have profound economic development impacts on individual families and neighborhoods. From the individual perspective, research shows college graduates earning \$1 million over a lifetime more than someone with just a high school diploma, as well as providing an economic boost to families who have never had anyone attend college (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Additionally, increased college-going rates for individuals in communities with historically low college-going rates could increase a culture of college expectations in certain “college-deficient” communities and neighborhoods.

#### Background on Hiram Johnson High School (HJHS)

Hiram Johnson High School is one of six comprehensive high schools within the Sacramento City Unified School District, a large urban district that serves one of the most diverse student populations in the City of Sacramento. The school’s demographics are as follows: 33% Hispanic/Latino, 31% Asian, 18% African American, 13% White, and 5% other. In comparison, the school is much more racially and ethnically diverse than the

Sacramento City Unified School District, the City of Sacramento, the County of Sacramento, and the State of California as wholes. Table 1 illustrates these demographic comparisons.

Table 1

*Hiram Johnson High School Demographic Comparison*

	Latino- Hispanic	Asian	African- American	White	Other
HJHS	33%	31%	18%	13%	5%
Sacramento City School District	36%	19%	18%	19%	8%
City of Sacramento	27%	20%	15%	26%	12%
County of Sacramento	22%	14%	10%	48%	6%
State of California	38%	13%	6%	40%	3%

(Sacramento City Unified School District [SCUSD], 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010)

The school has a large English Language Learner (ELL) population that makes up 43% of the 2,100-person campus. By comparison, this ELL student population is almost double the ELL percentage of the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) at 24% and the state percentage of 25%. At the time of the school's opening in 1958, Hiram Johnson served a predominately White, middle-income population. Since that time, major changes have taken place in its school community, and, currently, 62% of its

students are on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Economics and demographics have also changed significantly in the Tahoe Park neighborhood where the high school is located. Built to serve a post-World War II, Baby Boom-driven bedroom community, the school's academic performance is now among the lowest performing in the area. Tables 2 and 3 show API test scores of the school. With an API score of 612 (see Table 2), the school's academic performance is unfortunately among the lowest deciles in the state of California.

Table 2

*2010 API Scores*

HJHS	612
Sacramento City School District Average (Among seven district large high schools)	744

(SCUSD, 2010)

Despite widespread, ongoing reform efforts, Hiram Johnson High School has continued to struggle to raise student academic performance and college readiness. Annual School Accountability Reports clearly demonstrate that HJHS is a low performing school in terms of college preparation. Roughly just 16% of graduating seniors passed course requirements for admission to the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU). These numbers again show results below local and state averages (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Percentages of High School Graduates Meeting UC/CSU Course Requirements*

HJHS	16%
Sacramento County Average	34%
State of California Average	37%

(SCUSD, 2010)

In 2006, when Operation College launched, Hiram Johnson High School had a ratio of one counselor for approximately 525 students/families resulting in caseloads more than twice the recommended by the American School Counselor Association, and over five times that recommended by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (McDonough, 2005). School and District Administrators stated that lack of funding for an urban school did not afford options to fully staff a counseling department. These factors are especially important in schools dealing with traditional urban social issues and problems. As I later explore, counselors having to focus on contrasting numbers of other responsibilities could have their abilities to focus on postsecondary guidance and planning greatly hindered.

#### Background on HJHS Operation College

The program (HJHS Operation College), launched in the summer of 2006, provided annual funding to employ a specialized counselor to focus solely on providing guidance to students regarding higher education opportunities. This position was developed to craft a specialized, tailored, and coordinated program to engage students and their families about the college process. The model used at HJHS, adding the new

counselor for a “College Counseling” effort only, charted a new course. Prevailing models probably assumed that new monies for school counselors would be used to help address the general student/counselor ratios with typical “guidance counselor” duties, whereas this local effort had a sole focus on college planning and college information. Later, I explore how this thinking and planning for HJHS Operation College evolved.

### Evaluation and Case Study of HJHS Operation College

This evaluation and case study of HJHS Operation College effort consist of both qualitative and quantitative analyses. The qualitative analysis consists of individual interviews with stakeholders directly engaged in the project, while the quantitative analysis delves into documentation of actual changes in behavior with students in the college process. The general research question is the exploration of the success of the four-year effort. In other words, did HJHS Operation College work?

#### *Qualitative Data— Surveys/Interview Groups*

To study the impact of this program, several interviews were conducted with those engaged with the effort. The survey/interview discussion was free-flow, but relatively structured with unambiguous questions posed, such as:

- Did things change since the year(s) before Operation College?
- Were more people (students, families, and HJHS personnel) talking about college?
- Did students and families receive more information about the college process compared to the prior year(s)?

- Was there more of a “College-Going Culture” on campus?
- Did things change since before Operation College?
- Overall, did it work? And if so, why?
- If it did work, what are lessons for the future and how can the effort live on?

#### *Quantitative Data—Results Year-to-Year*

An analysis of raw data via a quantitative route is examined by delving into four main indicators: 1) financial aid applications via the FAFSA/Cal Grant program application, 2) college applications to higher education institutions, 3) students taking college entrance exams, and 4) student/family participation in “College Family Nights.” Each of the above indicators involved data the year prior to Operation College to the year after its inception.

The following chapter includes a Literature Review of work on college-going rates and the college culture specially focused on underrepresented individuals and communities. Next, I further explore the Higher Johnson Operation College case study. Chapter 3 includes the data and results of HJHS Operation College. And, lastly, in the conclusion, I zero in on the overall success of the program and look at lessons learned. In essence, did it work and what are the lessons for education leaders and policymakers in other Sacramento and State locations?

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Current research shows vast analysis on the topic of college access and specifically outlines numerous impediments to college attendance for low-income and ethnic-minority students. In addition, studies outline possible remedies to increase college access to students with a lower socio economic status (SES). This literature review starts with a snapshot on the societal impact of access to college and outlines elements of a “college-going culture,” used to promote increased participation in higher education. However, the main crux of this literature review is a look at challenges for college attainment for students of low-SES backgrounds, and a look at literature forwarding potential remedies expanding college opportunities for these students.

The issue of “college access for all” has increasingly become a societal issue with a focus on both “societal economics” and “family economics.” From an economic perspective, there is the belief that the nation’s and state’s economic future depends on helping push more individuals toward higher education with a demand for a more educated workforce. A 2005 study showed that more than 80% of the jobs needed in the fastest 30 growing occupations necessitate some level of postsecondary education or training, with almost 50% of these jobs mandating at least a bachelor’s degree (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2005a). In 2007, the Public Policy Institute of California reported that the California economy is likely to face major challenges over the next 20



years since the state is not producing enough college-educated workers (Johnson & Reed, 2007).

Furthermore, this has become an issue regarding the personal economic wellbeing of individuals and families because of the increasing disappearance of good paying, blue-collar manufacturing jobs throughout the United States. Decent paying, middle-class employment options for those without a college education have waned over the few past decades. In California, over a 25-year period between 1979 and 2005, workers with only high school degrees saw their real hourly wages (adjusted for inflation) decrease by 12.5%, while wages for those with college degrees saw wage increases of nearly 11% (Johnson & Reed, 2007).

In the post-World War II era, for several decades, workers without a college education could find plentiful employment options in good-paying, blue-collar jobs such as manufacturing and the skilled trades. Today, these jobs have increasingly disappeared with technological advances and the outsourcing of these positions to other countries. Many times, in their place are service industry jobs that do not pay “middle class” wages nor offer quality benefits. Table 4 shows how actual job opportunities for those with a high school education or less have declined dramatically (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2011).

Table 4

*Percentages of Total U.S. Job Opportunities Based upon Years of Education by Year*

	1973	2007
Some College or More	28%	59%
High School Dropout or High School Graduates	72%	41%

(SCUSD, 2010)

Furthermore, according to figures from the Census Bureau (2005), workers over the age of 18 with a college degree earn roughly \$51,200 per year, while those with only a high school diploma earn roughly \$27,900 per year.

#### What is a College-Going Culture?

Preminent “College Access” researcher and UCLA Professor Patricia McDonough has extensively looked into what elements are necessary to provide a “College-Going Culture” for schools and students. Her work identified nine critical elements and ingredients to foster and build a college-going culture. These nine elements include the following:

- 1) College Talk,
- 2) Clear Expectations,
- 3) Information and Resources,
- 4) Comprehensive Counseling Model,
- 5) Testing and Curriculum,
- 6) Faculty Involvement,

- 7) Family Involvement,
- 8) College Partnerships, and
- 9) Articulation.

As could be easily deduced, the nine factors are sure to vary from school to school, especially in those whose students are drawn from a community with a low-SES background, and are part of a fiscally challenged school district. Some of these elements were clearly lacking at HJHS; however, some elements had footprints, which were expanded upon and implemented at HJHS (McClafferty & McDonough, 2002). A more detailed look at the nine elements is in Table 5.

Table 5

*Nine Elements of a College-Going Culture*

College Talk Clear, ongoing communication among teachers, students, administrators, and families about what it takes to get to college	Clear Expectation Explicit, clearly defined goals, communicated in ways that make them part of the school culture	Information and Resources Comprehensive, up-to-date college information and resources, easily accessible by all students, families and school personnel
Comprehensive Counseling Model A view of counseling that makes all student interactions with counseling staff opportunities for college counseling	Testing and Curriculum Information about and access to “gatekeeping” tests (PSAT, SAT, ACT, etc.) and courses (Advanced Placement and honors courses) for all students	Faculty Involvement Informed, active participation from school faculty in the creation and maintenance of a college culture
Family Involvement Meaningful engagement on the part of family members in the process of building a college culture.	College Partnerships Active links in a variety of forms between the school and local colleges and universities.	Articulation Ongoing coordination between counselors and teachers among all schools in a feeder group.

(McClafferty & McDonough, 2002)

Research has delved into many factors affecting low college-going rates for those with a lower SES. This research looks at the lack of college preparation, the effects of high school dropout rates, lack of education from family members, societal pressures, and

lack of basic college information via the lack of college counseling/advising services. Essentially, the research explored follows up on two of the nine college-going culture elements previously discussed: Information and Resources and Comprehensive Counseling.

The next section reviews research and literature on the impediments to accessing college. Specifically, the review looks at academic research on the lack of basic college information from counseling/advising services or “college counselors” for high school students in low-SES communities. The literature is typically broken down into 1) the challenges to attaining college information for those in low-SES communities and 2) possible remedies for increasing college information for those generally left behind when it comes to college access.

In California, in 1960, the State Legislature and Governor enacted a landmark law creating a Master Plan for Higher Education. The covenants of this Master Plan were assurances that a high quality higher education would be affordable and accessible for all California citizens who could benefit from it. However, research and studies show that despite efforts in California to promote affordability for disadvantaged families, college is often inaccessible and unattainable for many Californians. Much of the literature and that being discussed focuses on accessibility through the “eyes” of affordability. However, research shows that the real dilemma many times lies in the cases where college could be “affordable” for lower income students if they were intimately aware of financial aid programs targeted for low-income students. The real challenge may not be

the lack of programs, but lack of detailed information for low-income families. The next two sections of the literature review look at the issue of college access through the lenses of “Challenges” and potential “Remedies.”

#### Challenges to Attaining College Information for Low-SES Communities

Two surveys of low-income Latino students and families illustrated the great challenge in educating both students and families about realities, facts, and myths about the “college process.” The reports found that lack of college information is the greatest impediment to college enrollment, even more significant than money (Immerwahr, 2003; Pachon & Estela, 2005). With 400-plus interviews of Latino youth between the ages of 18 and 24, major findings in the Pachon and Estela report include the following:

55% of Latino youth who did not attend college were unaware of the landmark

State of California Cal Grant program which guarantees financial aid for qualified low income high school students;

80% of Latino young adults had an inaccurate perception about true costs of attendance at the University of California and the California State University systems, most severely over-estimating the costs of attendance;

25% falsely believed that their parents needed to be U.S. citizens in order to apply for college financial aid; and,

75% of those not in college cited financial aid as a factor in their decision not to attend college. (Pachon & Estela, 2005, pp. 12-14)

Fifty interviews of Latino high school seniors from Arizona, Illinois, New York, and Texas by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education showed similar, but wider reaching insights about the knowledge needed in relation to college attendance (Immerwhar, 2003). The 50 respondents were grouped into three categories: likely college-bound, unlikely college-bound, and “college maybes,” with the analysis focusing on this last group. The significant findings among the “college maybes” included the following:

Interviews suggesting that many “college maybes” believed (wrongly) they needed to know what they would be studying before enrolling in a university; Most “college maybes” had ill-informed parents and family members about the higher education process, and thereby had to do all the decision making about their higher education future themselves, with little or no adult guidance; Several “college maybes” were prime for financial aid, but unaware of existing grants; Many “college maybes” had pre-occupied and discouraged teachers, left with little energy to focus on higher education opportunities; and, A conclusion that enhanced, structured college information efforts would lead to more “college maybes” actually enrolling in higher education institutions.

Both studies illustrate the power of information. The research shows that good/accurate information about college opportunities can greatly enhance the likelihood that “college maybes” will enroll in institutions of higher education. While many

individuals can and do make informed decisions to not pursue higher education, those decisions are made on their own accord. This research could be used in the proposed model to test whether helping to provide such good/accurate information about college opportunities to students and their families actually increases college-going rates for targeted populations.

While it is likely other challenges will exist in ensuring eventual success in a college setting, such as adequate preparation and remediation, the studies and research above point to the many challenges of ensuring that lower income students know they can make college happen with increased “higher-education knowledge.” In other words, the cases laid out here point to the task of just trying to get targeted students to college while tackling preparation and eventual success later.

The community-based organization and student-driven Oasis/Community IMPACT showed that a major gap exists between student aspirations for college and actual college attainment. Their survey of local public high school students from low-SES backgrounds showed that roughly 70% of the high school seniors said they would go on to college, but only 30-35% actually went after graduation. The major gap here may further illustrate the information gaps that serve as roadblocks to higher education (Oasis/Community IMPACT, 2006).

One other piece of research explores a social theory in regard to whether students actually evaluate themselves as “college material.” McDonough (1997) discusses the “functionalist educational attainment theory,” in which students evaluate their place in



the “academic hierarchy” by looking at their own personal and family standing in society. In essence, the notion here is that students fall back on what they know and are surrounded with in their lives with regard to advanced educational options. Hence, if they come from a family without role models who went on to college, they seem relegated to this reality unless a strong, consistent intervening factor comes into place, such as critical information or counseling services that show that college can be a reality for anyone, regardless of income or SES status. This theory may pinpoint why students still face huge hurdles on higher education advancement unless increased college information from counseling services is robust and consistent. This issue is explored in the Hiram Johnson Operation College case study.

#### Remedies to Increase College Information for Those Generally Left Behind When it Comes to College Access

According to McDonough (2005), the high school students who need the most college information help from counselors face decreased accessibility to such high school counselors for guidance. Her main remedy, as could be expected, was to increase the number and talent in high school counseling departments. Some insights in her work include:

Findings that urban, lower income schools face double whammies, with students who receive little or no college information help at home attending schools with challenging student-to-counselor ratios. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends student-to-counselor ratio of 250:1 with the actual national average being 477:1;

*[Of note, and mentioned in Chapter 1, the HJHS student-to-counselor ratio at the beginning of Operation College in 2006 was 525 to 1.]*

The report also showed that schools having majority White populations have ratios of 300:1 while schools in large urban areas have ratios of 750:1; and The reality that the primary tasks of counseling are scheduling, testing, and discipline, with college counseling coming in as the fourth priority only if there is time.

Overall, the report found that those most likely to be influenced by their high school counselor about college opportunities as opposed to by their family members were also the ones least likely to have access to high school counselors. Therefore, it was stated that increasing counselor access could help foster a better college culture among lower income minority students (McDonough, 2005).

McDonough (2005) and King (1996) both make the case that college counseling is not only a key component to ensuring one of the key elements of fostering a true college-going culture, but also to illustrating how such efforts have actually increased college participation for students from low-SES backgrounds. King does this via her research and surveys of low-income high school seniors who took the SAT exam and documented a positive correlation to actual college attendance. Specifically, she pinpointed that lower income students were in fact more likely to go on to college when they had frequent support from a college guidance counselor.

Following the work of McDonough, the report from “College Access: From the Inside Out” documents strategies for increasing basic college information for students and families from low-SES backgrounds (Oasis/Community IMPACT, 2006). They point to the need to focus less on guidance counseling and more on specific college/career counseling, especially for students from families without college degrees.

Miguel Ceja (2004), in *Chicana College Aspirations and the Role of Parents: Developing Educational Resiliency*, outlines the significance of fostering a “culture of possibility” with students and parents without significant knowledge regarding the path to college. He showed that first to go to college Latinas with limited college knowledge still were about to benefit from supportive families who believed that a path for higher education did exist for them. He pointed to parents using their personal stories of overcoming adversity and challenges helping to further motivate students to “find meaning in their current realities” (Ceja, 2004, p. 358).

Lastly, some research points to the overarching need to make the sole information campaign focus on the parents/families and have them encourage and navigate their kids through the college maze. Research by Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999), in *Going to College: How Social, Economic and Educational Factors Influence the Decisions Students Make*, paints a picture of a preeminent need to place the major emphasis not on the student but on the parents/families, starting in the early high school years. They argue that parents’ mis-information, or conversely, accurate information about the college process and financial realities about paying for college makes the biggest difference. In

some contrast to McDonough's focus on the crucial importance of having active counseling service with students, these authors point to the greater need for a detailed college information and dissemination systems for the families of would-be college students. This approach, however, is in concert with the McClafferty and McDonough (2002) view of family engagement as included in one of the nine critical elements to creating a college culture. This literature review sets the stage for the next sections of the case study that explore whether an increased and focused college guidance program at HJHS (a lower income, lower performing urban high school) can, in fact, increase college participation rates.

### Chapter 3

#### DESCRIPTION OF HIRAM JOHNSON SCHOOL OPERATION: COLLEGE: HOW IT STARTED AND WHAT THE GOALS WERE

This chapter offers a description of *Hiram Johnson High School, Operation: College*, the subject of study for this thesis. It provides a chronology of how the program was envisioned and how it came to fruition. It walks through the elements that were to be included in the pilot project just before its launch. Lastly, the chapter outlines the elements that would be utilized to measure the success of the program.

In 2005, I (Sacramento City Councilmember Kevin McCarty) and Chris Stevens, President of Cambridge Homes, partnered with a goal to increase college opportunities for low-income students at an urban Sacramento High School. Stevens, then a successful businessman in his early 30s, stated from the outset his desire to give back to the Sacramento community by helping economically challenged high school teens craft a better path toward college. He was really struck and felt extremely fortunate about the opportunities given to him as a high school student in an affluent area of Sacramento. In turn, he wanted to invest and give back via a thoughtful effort and program. He pledged up to \$100,000 in funding to help a local urban high school improve their college-going culture and increase the number of students going to college. Stevens and I both committed to help fundraise in the out-years if the initial investment proved to make a difference.

Being recently elected as a councilmember, I approached my district's high school, Hiram Johnson (HJHS), to determine a best approach. I asked the HJHS

administrators for their recommendation and how to program such an investment. I had an initial meeting with then Principal Lynne Tafoya and approached her about launching a public/private endeavor to expand college opportunities at HJHS. Tafoya, also new at HJHS after serving as a principal at a nearby district middle school, was very excited about such an opportunity. She asked to meet in a follow-up meeting to present a plan for such a significant and charitable commitment. Both Stevens and I were determined to allow Principal Tafoya to direct us as to a best approach for using private resources. Essentially, we were looking to find the biggest bang for the buck to expand college opportunity with a \$100,000 investment.

At this key meeting, Tafoya focused on the need to enhance efforts to forge a real college-going culture and subsequently increase college-going rates at HJHS. A major attribute pointed out by Tafoya was a lack of robust and focused college counseling and a college information dissemination program. Principal Tafoya described how the campus had only four counselors for roughly 2,100 students, thus equating to a ratio of 525 students for every counselor—well above the desired national goal of “one-per-250” as outlined in prior chapters. She felt a significant number of students there were “college material” and lack of information was a major hurdle to helping them and their families navigate the college maze.

Principal Tafoya described how the problems were further compounded given the fact the counselors had to focus an inordinate amount of time on “other” activities, thus limiting their time for college outreach. Major primary counselor tasks among the HJHS

counselor crew included scheduling and addressing personal student problems that arose at a struggling urban high school. Of significance, she went into detail about how on a recent day, counselors spent a majority of their time helping one student navigate social service programs for his homeless family and another student deal with severe problems at home. In essence, she painted a picture of counselors working in a “triage center” focusing on the issue of the day, not long-term issues such as college planning. To counteract what she described, Tafoya proposed the investment be made to hire a dedicated “college counselor,” whose sole focus would be to provide direct services to students and their families about the college process.

Stevens and I decided before launching the effort and formalizing the monetary commitment at HJHS, a panel of experienced higher education policy experts should convene to discuss the Tafoya strategy. We felt strongly about the idea put forth, but believed with such a major investment contemplated, a thoughtful pre-evaluation process was warranted. This working group met for the better part of six months geared at evaluating the strategy and ultimately coming up with a quantified, solid plan to launch at the beginning of the 2006-07 school year. The working group was designed to solicit input from higher education policy experts, those with academic insight into roadblocks for college access for underrepresented groups, and individuals engaged in the local community. Also, the group was crafted to have on-the-ground insight from administrators at the high school. The group primarily consisted of the following people:

Maria Alvarez, District Director, Office of Councilmember Kevin McCarty,

Nancy Anton, Consultant, California State Senate Education Committee,  
Chris Woods, Chief Consultant, California State Assembly Budget Committee,  
Miguel Ceja, Public Policy Professor, CSU Sacramento,  
Lynne Tafoya, HJHS Principal,  
Mike Crosby, HJHS Vice-Principal, and  
Anna Vue, Hmong community member and public relations professional.

After the several monthly working group meetings, it was apparent that all involved embraced the Tafoya/HJHS approach; there was no dissent from anyone. There was some discussion that other needs were present on campus, but with the funder's desire to increase college-going rates, and help improve the campus' college-going culture, this approach was fully supported as a viable path. The key discussion at the early meeting involved whether it would be better to invest the pledged resources to hire an additional "general counselor" to throw into the mix, thus allowing the three other counselors some breathing room, OR to try a new approach as Tafoya suggested and hire a counselor with the sole and dedicated effort to a "college initiative." Of note from these meetings were supportive discussions that the dedicated college counselor could provide valuable insight, previously lacking, to the "college maybes" and their families. As discussed in the prior chapter, and highlighted with academic research from working group member Miguel Ceja, many "college maybes" lacked viable options for tracking down basic college information.



The program was thus launched, to be dubbed Operation College, with the notion that it would be conducted with military precision and a sole goal of increasing college-going rates for the students while helping produce a college-going culture in the school and community. The focused approach of Operation College would allow the hiring of a full-time college counselor to work with students in conjunction with HJHS faculty and staff, college and university recruiters, and community-based personnel to provide students with monthly college preparation workshops, one-on-one college advising, college application assistance, family information nights, and college campus visits (Alvarez & Sidqe, 2006).

#### HJHS Operation College Launch – Summer 2006

In the spring/summer of 2006, *Hiram Johnson High School and Operation: College* hired Sheila Sidqe as the “College Initiatives Counselor” with the goal of officially launching the program at the beginning of the 2006-07 school year. The working group gave direction to Principal Tafoya to post a job opening through the normal district hiring protocol for the “college initiatives” counselor at HJHS. This approach also ensured that local union and school district leadership would support the new effort. The desired candidate was to have 1) focused skills and experience working to help low-income high school students navigate the college maze and 2) a deep understanding of the ongoing and changing college entrance requirements. After reviewing and interviewing several candidates, Tafoya recommended Sidqe, in large part because of her work as a UC Davis academic and college outreach counselor, which

allowed her to engage local urban high school students on the college preparation and application process.

The working group, in conjunction with Principal Tafoya, her staff, and newly hired College Initiatives Counselor, Sidqe, created a focused outline of the goals for the new program. The Tafoya model, outlined earlier, was to have the college counselor at Hiram Johnson exempted from managing a specific caseload of students and to work instead full-time to develop and implement the postsecondary counseling program. The HJHS Operation College working group and Sidqe met monthly for three months to develop a road map for the new plan beginning in the fall of 2006. Further, Sidqe, with support from HJHS administration, researched best practices on college counseling/outreach efforts and came up with a specific plan and outline on programs and services for students and ways to engage families. It was determined as a goal from the outset that every student, no matter the skill level, should be informed about and engaged in a path to college. This was part of the overall will of the working group to believe that every high school student could benefit from a higher education option, from Community College (which offers basic general education, vocational, and remedial programs) to university CSU and UC options.

The new position was to work in conjunction with school-wide and community-based personnel to:

- a) Develop informational materials for other school counselors to distribute to their student caseloads about important dates and deadlines in the college admissions process.
- b) Provide coverage of classes for teachers in order to conduct college exploration and application workshops.
- c) Organize “college awareness activities” and trainings with the staff, implemented on a school-wide basis.
- d) Conduct regular, in-class presentations to students of all grade levels about important postsecondary planning issues students must address at different points in their high school careers.
- e) Coordinate visits and presentations of outreach personnel from local community-based organizations, colleges, and universities for students and their parents and families.
- f) Supervise counseling interns.
- g) Work as part of the larger school-wide improvement and leadership team to develop and implement strategies to further individualize Hiram Johnson High School’s postsecondary guidance and planning services for every student.

The Operation: College and College Initiatives Counselor was to develop and deliver a comprehensive array of direct services and activities to address postsecondary planning and transition needs of students at all grade levels. These programs and activities were to include but not be limited to:

- a) Regular lunchtime college application workshops targeted to specific school systems including the California Community Colleges, California State University, University of California, and Independent Colleges and Universities;
- b) Evening college information and financial aid sessions and workshops for students and their parents/families utilizing guest speakers and experts from community-based postsecondary institutions aimed at increasing the number of college-bound seniors successfully completing financial aid applications (at the start of the program, numbers stood at less than one-third of the graduating class);
- c) Targeted school-day and after-school programs for providing information to ninth-, 10<sup>th</sup>-, and 11<sup>th</sup>-grade students and their families about college readiness, admissions testing, application processes, and financial planning for postsecondary education, with Hiram Johnson faculty and expert guest speakers from local institutions;
- d) Cross-age teaching experiences for each grade level involving panels of students from local colleges and universities; and
- e) Workshops at feeder middle schools to provide incoming ninth graders and their parents/families with important information about the high school experience and expectations, graduation requirements, development of college-preparatory

high school course plans, and college and career exploration resources (Alvarez & Sidqe, 2006).

The postsecondary counselor was to work in conjunction with Hiram Johnson faculty, staff, students, parents/families, and community-based personnel to produce and distribute targeted informational literature and publications with the intention of supporting the circulation of essential postsecondary planning information and the creation of a strong college-going message and culture within the larger school community. The publications and literature were to include:

- a) scholarship bulletins;
- b) senior newsletters (both print and electronic);
- c) parent bulletins;
- d) timelines and monthly email reminders about important upcoming dates, deadlines, and events;
- e) regular school-wide announcements over the PA;
- f) development and upkeep of web-based resources specifically developed for Hiram Johnson students and families; and

g) a spring “college-going” publication featuring lists of seniors’ college acceptances that would aid in evaluation of the college application support services, provide a student-driven approach to developing a college-going culture, and upon wider circulation in the school community, validate the postsecondary-preparation efforts of faculty and staff at both Hiram Johnson and our feeder middle schools while continuing to improve the reputation of our school within the community (Alvarez & Sidqe, 2006).

#### Evaluation Plan

The working group also spent a great deal of time focusing on creating a system to evaluate the success of Operation College. It was believed the approach could serve as a pilot for other local schools and possible districts across the state, raising the number of high school students entering college. The working group decided the successes of the proposed programs, projects, and activities resulting from the restructuring of the Hiram Johnson postsecondary counseling services would be measured by the degree to which students and their families were supported to successfully prepare for and navigate postsecondary planning and transition processes. The overarching signs of this success would be reflected in the creation of a strong college-going culture within the larger school community. However, specific measurement of this success was conducted annually primarily through the collection of quantitative data with an attempt to also gather insight via qualitative efforts such as interviews and surveys.

Evaluation of postsecondary counseling services at Hiram Johnson High School and data collection pieces included: a) records of academic preparation for UC and CSU admission; b) numbers of students taking college entrance examinations (i.e., SAT, ACT) and preparatory examinations (i.e., PSAT, PLAN); c) numbers of students completing FAFSA, Cal Grant, and other financial aid documentation; d) college-acceptance and college-going figures for graduating seniors (i.e., admissions figures for UC, CSU, independent colleges/universities, and California Community Colleges; e) college retention rates for recent graduates; and f) numbers of ninth- and 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students who had completed career assessment and/or college exploration workshops (Alvarez & Sidqe, 2006).

The following chapter includes a look at the actual results of Operation College via quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative approach analyzes year-to-year changes in student data related to college and financial aid applications. The qualitative approach looks at interviews with stakeholders including those from the initial Operation College working group at inception and former and current Hiram Johnson High School staff.

## Chapter 4

### RESULTS

As outlined in earlier chapters, Hiram Johnson High School Operation College was launched in 2006 with a goal to increase college-going rates and help the campus improve its college-going culture. The recently hired college initiatives counselor Sheila Sidqe was to work solely on efforts to achieve these goals without focusing at all on general high school counseling work. The pilot project was to last four years with a goal of possible expansion and replication if the overarching goals were met. It did in fact last for four years, from 2006 to 2010, and was not expanded in large part because of the national, state, and local financial and economic woes during the tail end of the project. This chapter provides both a quantitative and qualitative review of Operation College. The qualitative section looks at interviews and commentary from individuals closely associated with the project.

#### Quantitative Results

The quantitative section of this case study looks into Operation College's goals at inception and provides analysis based on data derived from the project. Launched in the 2006-07 school year, Hiram Johnson High School Operation College was implemented by hiring a specialized counselor to provide guidance to students and their families on higher education opportunities and the college application/financial aid process. At inception, the Operation College working group developed indicators for success with a goal of increasing the numbers annually and over the life of the four-year project. The



primary methodology for this project was derived from evaluating the numeric changes in these five data indicators: 1) financial aid forms via the FAFSA/Cal Grant program application; 2) actual college applications to higher education institutions; 3) the number of juniors and seniors taking the college placement ACT and SAT exams; 4) student/family engagement participation in “College Information Family Nights;” and 5) students completing the A-G course college requirements (classes high school students must complete to be minimally eligible for admission to the UC or CSU systems). What follows is a review of each of the above topics for the school year (2005-06) prior to the inception of Operation College through the 2009-10 school year, the final year of the project.

In Table 6, I offer an outline of the number of HJHS students completing the standard financial aid applications to be eligible for college aid. These forms, called the Federal Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) applications, enable students to solicit aid via the State of California Cal Grant program and the Federal Pell Grant programs, as well as a number of other student loans options. As table 6 depicts, in 2005-06 (the year prior to Operation College) 20% of seniors completed a FAFSA application, and by 2009-10, 58% of seniors completed a FAFSA application. This represented a 190% increase in students applying for financial aid during HJHS Operation College.

Table 6

*Students Completing Financial Aid Applications via the FAFSA/Cal Grant Program*

YEAR	Percentage of HJHS seniors completing a FAFSA application
2005-2006	20%
(Year prior to Operation: College)	
2006-2007	27%
2007-2008	31%
2008-2009	41%
2009-2010	58%

(Sidqe, 2010)

Next, I describe the number of HJHS seniors who completed admission applications for higher education institutions. This includes two-year or four-year options including the California Community College (CCC) system, the University of California (UC), and California State University (CSU) systems, as well as applications to other colleges and universities. As Table 7 depicts, in 2005-06 (the year prior to Operation College) 65% of seniors completed applications for college or university, and by 2009-10, 96% of seniors completed college or university applications. This represented a 48% increase in students applying to college or university during HJHS Operation College. In addition, the data shows an increase in annual applications to each of the three higher education systems in California mentioned above.

Table 7

*Student College Applications to Higher Education Institutions*

YEAR	Percentage of HJHS seniors completing a college application
2005-2006 (Year prior to Operation: College)	65% (3% UC, 10% CSU, and 51% CCC)
2006-2007	89% (10% UC, 16% CSU, and 63% CCC)
2007-2008	94% (5% UC, 16% CSU, and 73% CCC)
2008-2009	96% (7% UC, 22% CSU, and 77% CCC)
2009-2010	96% (9% UC, 24% CSU, and 63% CCC)

(Sidqe, 2010)

Next is a review of the number of HJHS juniors and seniors who participated in college entrance exams. These combined numbers include takers of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Testing (ACT) exams. As Table 8 illustrates, in 2005-06 (the year prior to Operation College) 21% of juniors and seniors were taking the SAT or ACT college entrance exams, and by 2009-10, 52% of juniors or seniors were taking the exams. This represented an approximate 150% increase in

students taking the required college entrance exams for the UC and CSU higher education systems.

Table 8

*Juniors and Seniors Taking College Placement Exams*

YEAR	Percentage of 11 <sup>th</sup> - and 12 <sup>th</sup> -grade HJHS students taking the SAT and ACT exams
2005-2006 (Year prior to Operation: College)	21%
2006-2007	27%
2007-2008	38%
2008-2009	41%
2009-2010	52%

(Sidqe, 2010)

Table 9 outlines the increase in the number of families participating in campus college information nights. The family information events brought parents to the school campus in the evening and provided college information in several individual languages. At these family engagement events, parents grouped together en masse for a typical general assembly about the basics on the path to college. After this initial session, families were then separated into at least four smaller groups in which staff provided more in-depth information in English, Spanish, and several Southeast Asian languages. As Table 9 shows, the total attendance at HJHS family engagement nights was a measly

15 participants in 2005-2006 (the year prior to Operation College). By 2009-2010, nearly 1,000 individuals were attending the Operation College family information nights annually.

Table 9

*Families Participating on College Information Nights*

YEAR	People attending family college information nights
2005-2006 (Year prior to Operation: College)	15 people
2006-2007	506 people
2007-2008	943 people
2008-2009	896 people
2009-2010	998 people

(Sidqe, 2010)

Lastly, Table 9 outlines the increase in HJHS students (freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors) taking the A-G course pattern with a “C” grade or better. Again, the A-G classes make up the minimum required course load needed to have basic eligibility to attend the UC or CSU systems. As Table 10 shows, participation at every grade level significantly increased over the four-year period Operation College was in place.

Table 10

*Students Participation with A-G Courses*

YEAR	A-G Course Participation (per grade level)
2005-2006 (Year prior to Operation College)	9 <sup>th</sup> =no data, 10 <sup>th</sup> =28%, 11 <sup>th</sup> =28%, 12 <sup>th</sup> =26%
2006-2007	9 <sup>th</sup> =51%, 10 <sup>th</sup> =33%, 11 <sup>th</sup> =29%, 12 <sup>th</sup> =27%
2007-2008	9 <sup>th</sup> =39%, 10 <sup>th</sup> =53%, 11 <sup>th</sup> =36%, 12 <sup>th</sup> =31%
2008-2009	9 <sup>th</sup> =54%, 10 <sup>th</sup> =43%, 11 <sup>th</sup> =59%, 12 <sup>th</sup> =39%
2009-2010	9 <sup>th</sup> =47%, 10 <sup>th</sup> =43%, 11 <sup>th</sup> =42%, 12 <sup>th</sup> =42%

(Sidqe, 2010)

## Qualitative Results

This qualitative section of the case study gives insight about Operation College from the individuals involved with the creation, development, and implementation of the four-year pilot project. Individuals interviewed for the section include Sheila Sidqe, Operation College Counselor 2006-10; Lynne Tafoya, HJHS Principal 2005-09; Nancy Anton, HJHS Operation College Working Group Member 2006-09; and Briana Osbourne, HJHS Student 2005-09. Following is their insight and analysis of the pilot project.

Each interviewee was well versed on the dual goals of Operation College from the onset. The dual goals of 1) improving the college-going culture on the high school campus; and 2) improving numeral targets (more students completing college and

financial aid applications, more students taking college entrance exams, and more families participating in college information nights) were highlighted from the beginning, as they were measured annually and at the end of the four-year pilot project.

*Were the following Operation College general objectives met?*

*1) improving the college-going culture and atmosphere on campus; and*

*2) increasing the numbers of students applying for college admissions and financial aid, taking college entrance exams, and participating in family engagement/college night.*

All interviewees concurred that the dual objectives borne at the creation of the project were met. Through their participation in the project on campus or via the working group, each interviewee generally concluded that the presence of an on-campus, high school counselor dedicated to disseminating college information and engaging students and their families regarding the path to higher education increased the overall college-going culture on campus. This belief coincides with the notion put forth earlier in the literature review that a dedicated counselor position could help fill the void and provide basic college information and a road map for lower income students and their families (Immerwhar, 2003; Pachon & Estela, 2005)

With regard to the quantifiable metrics of the project listed above, each interviewee was well aware of the increases for each category.

*Based upon the goals of Operation College, was the project (1) a complete success, (2) a partial success, or (3) not successful?*

Those interviewed for the case study described the project as a complete success or partial success. Principal Tafoya labeled the project as a partial success. She said staff buy-in was complete, the right individual was hired, and the game plan was executed successfully. However, she labeled it as a partial, not full, success since “in an urban high school with more 2,100 kids, in reality, more than one Sheila Sidqe was needed; we needed two or more to help with so many families needing support.” Lastly, Tafoya pointed to only a partial success since the dedicated counselor position is no longer on campus, and some of the success efforts may fade away.

Anton, Operation College working group member, succinctly stated it was a complete success since “all the metrics were clearly met.” Sidqe categorized the effort as a complete success. She pointed out, “We changed the climate of expectations for all students. The culture changed, more students were filling out college and financial aid applications and taking college entrance tests.” Former student Osbourne noted it was successful since, in her view, “more kids from the school and community were going on to college, as was the pride among students even considering moving on to college.”

*How did the college-going culture change on campus?*

Sidqe said the “increased college-culture and general college-talk around campus were evident.” She mentioned increased expectations among teachers, and said students reported they felt far more informed than in prior years about the basics of preparing and applying to college. Lastly, she reported that college outreach efforts such as the Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP) previously were not targeted for all students, and



the new effort made sure all students were able to benefit from programs like these. Lastly, she noted the huge influx of families coming to campus to learn about college helped create a significantly greater buzz about higher education options.

Of note, Tafoya, the Principal at HJHS from 2005 to 2009, pointed out that the pilot project “changed the conversation with staff, teachers and administrators that college should be an option for everyone.” She pointed to banners in the hallways and college-on-the-quad efforts where local colleges and universities would have a presence during the lunch hour to field questions from students. To her, it was paramount for more students to hear college talk in the halls and classrooms, and this was happening at the time. She shared an increased level of belief on campus among administrators, staff, and teachers that more students could realistically see a path for them to pursue a higher education. Each of these aspects outlined by Tafoya tie into one of the previously mentioned elements and definitions of a college-going culture (McClafferty & McDonough, 2002).

Both Tafoya and Sidqe noted many “college-maybes” who were able to navigate the college maze and successfully transition and succeed in college in large part because of the Operation College efforts. Anton, as noted above, pointed to the clear jump in metrics as a sign that life after high school, specifically college, was increasingly on the minds of those on campus. Former HJHS student Osbourne noted increased college talk in the school. She pointed to a sense of pride and honoring and promoting those getting

accepted to college with the administrators posting individual students' college acceptance letters in the hallways.

*What specific elements of the program most contributed to the success of the project?*

Tafoya pointed to all the elements as fruitful, but especially noted the field trips to local colleges and universities (UC Davis, CSU Sacramento, and Sacramento City College) and parent college information nights, when it was explained to parents about the basic process and pathways to pay for college.

Anton chose not to focus on the elements or work plan pieces of the project, but on the project as a whole. Her belief was that the “dedicated position to focus solely on college counseling without the general counseling distractions made the biggest difference.” This thought relates to the research that urban general counselors are too distracted by other pressing needs to focus on a down-the-road issue such as college (McDonough, 2005).

Like Anton, Sidqe pointed to the dedicated position as being the key and also pointed to the family information nights, financial aid application workshops, classroom workshops, and partnerships with colleges (such as colleges on the quad). Lastly, Osbourne, now a college student at Howard University, focused on how the college tours were extremely influential where HJHS students saw “kids that looked like us, from neighborhoods like ours, that could make it to college.”

*If budget constraints allowed for only partial resources to restore Operation College-based efforts, what elements would be most important to fund?*

Sidqe, as she noted above in the success overview, pointed to “family nights, financial aid workshops, and classroom workshops to break down the basics about the process and course requirement such as the A-G course requirements.” Anton, noting that economics is always an overreaching challenge for students and their families, pointed to efforts to provide the college entrance exams and the actual applications and FAFSA financial aid workshops. Tafoya focused on the elements of fields trips to colleges, lunchtime visits to the college quad, and cultural and language sensitive college information nights as efforts that should be prioritized to be reprogrammed. Osbourne responded that fee waivers for HJHS students to take the college entrance exams are especially key because they eliminate a financial burden and make students feel college worthy, just by taking the test. This thought from Osbourne corresponds to research showing SAT exam taking in and of itself correlates strongly with actual college attendance among lower income students (King, 1996). Osbourne also noted financial aid/FAFSA application workshops, and coordinating colleges to make visits to the campus would be most critical to have ongoing at HJHS.

*Knowing HJHS has many other needs, if \$100,000 was available annually, would you spend it on, Operation College or something else?*

Tafoya claimed she would indeed re-allocate such resources to a program like Operation College above other possible needs. She noted HJHS has many needs, but “there is no greater gift than giving the kids hope and a vision for the future.” Anton

stated this annual \$100,000 proved to be well spent, and worth replicating, even with other needs on campus. “Higher education and information and how to get there is so important for individuals to reach their full potential, and that’s what we are as a community.” Osbourne noted, “the school has other facility needs such as the need for adequate technology and computer labs, but efforts like proactive counseling efforts and Operation College are definitely needed, along with a continued supportive administration.” Lastly, Sidqe noted “although HJHS has many needs, the need to create a college-going culture is equally as important, especially since it has a large population of students who are first-generation students with limited information on the college-going process. This program had the capacity to affect change not only at the high school level, but also at the community level.

*What if Operation College helps guide students into college, but the students end up struggling in college because they weren’t prepared?*

As discussed in earlier sections, Operation College was created to help guide HJHS students through the college preparation and application process. Knowing the vision of the project was to help physically get students into the gates of college. Interviewees were also queried about the possible negative effects of facilitating ill prepared students’ entrance into college.

Anton pointed out that the path to higher education is an essential piece of the educational system, and students of all skills could benefit from college. She also made the analysis that promising, bright students with potential without insight and knowledge about the path to college are just as disadvantaged as those who end up in college without

the skills to succeed. Further, Anton pointed out that while UC and CSU have programs for really high-achieving students, the community college provides higher education options and remedial courses for those wanting to move on to a four-year university later or simply those looking to receive vocational training for a specific career. Tafoya stated, “If a student closes the door to college, it’s on them, not us. Our goal was to help get them there. It was never going to be because we failed to show every student a path to higher education.” Osbourne did note that while it is key to help kids like her to get there, preparation is key too. She said, “we weren’t the best for a competitive university, and there is a continued need to have teachers push, support and prepare us to succeed.” Sidqe alluded that part of her college advising process was to alert students to resources available to students upon entering college, helping them succeed including tutorial services, and providing them with academic advising support programs.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter focuses on the guiding questions of the case study of the Hiram Johnson High School Operation College pilot project. Was the project successful based upon the goals set forth at inception? And were there significant lessons learned? This chapter recaps the project and some of the research related to the case study results. I also outline possible shortcomings of both the research and project itself. Finally, I'll discuss the implications of the research findings as they provide insight for state policymakers and education administrators regarding college counseling services for high school students.

#### Case Study Recap

This master's thesis was a review and evaluation of the Hiram Johnson Operation College pilot project. The privately funded pilot project was in place for four school years from 2006 to 2010. As the local Sacramento City Councilmember for the area surrounding the high school campus, I helped lead efforts to raise the necessary resources to provide the \$100,000 annual budget for the four years. The major donor for the project was Chris Stevens of Cambridge Homes, while several other private donors and the City of Sacramento also contributed financially to the project.

The project's inception was based on the premise that many would-be college students at this low performing urban high school would probably be more likely to actually pull the trigger and attend college if a robust college counseling program was in

place on campus to help underserved students navigate the maze and path to higher education. The project did, in fact, succeed at the inception goals. As discussed in detail in Chapter 4, significant numeric increases occurred in the five metric goals put forth at the onset by having more students applying to college, apply for financial aid, take college entrance exams, take the requisite A-G course load, and attend college information nights.

This premise of forging a targeted path in assisting college maybes get over the top and attend college was paramount in much of the research I explored in the earlier literature review. There was ample research on the limited success of low-income students navigating the path to college. Some research pointed to the lack of general counseling services (McClafferty & McDonough, 2005) and other research to the lack of specific information provided to families who otherwise do not have readily available access to such college information (Hossler et al., 1999).

#### Challenges with Research and Findings

One weakness of my research finding is whether or not HJHS students actually enrolled in college after graduation. As detailed in the results section, there was a great increase in those preparing for and applying to college, but did they actually enroll, and did they transition from high school to college prepared to succeed?

#### *Did the HJHS Students Enroll in College?*

At the onset, the Operation College program had a mission to assist those in their high school years navigate the path to college and best prepare them to enroll in a higher

education institution. However, there was no data to quantify how many did enroll at a UC, CSU, Community College, or another college. Two main factors led to this void of information. First, the school district and HJHS does not monitor education progress after high school graduation. The data tracking systems for the public school system do not track this figure. Only National Student Clearinghouse provided cursory information on HJHS graduates, but I was unable to paint an accurate picture of the postsecondary attendance for HJHS students who participated in the Operation College years at the school. Data from the Clearinghouse showed positive first year of college completion rates for a subset of students from a specialized HJHS program, but was inconclusive on the overall first year of college completion rates.

The second factor and bigger issue here with Operation College was a conscious effort at the onset to focus the time and resources of the new counselor position to help prepare the students to get to college. The corresponding data points and collections from the Operation College project focused on efforts during the students' time on the high school campus and did not have a significant focus on tracking students after graduation. Based on the early belief from HJHS Principal Tafoya, and buoyed by research such as that from the Thomas Rivera Policy Institute, the working group had the primary goal of ensuring students and their families knew about tools to attend and afford college such as through the Cal Grant Entitlement program (Pachon & Estela, 2005). They were confident that given more information and guidance, more HJHS students would undoubtedly enroll in college.



In hindsight, to help paint a clearer picture of the long-term success or failure, a more robust tracking system would be advisable.

*Were HJHS Students Prepared to Succeed in College?*

Another possible flaw to the project is answering the question as to whether it wise to push some kids off to college who were ill prepared academically. This question and issue was debated at length at the inception of the project. In essence, the HJHS Operation College working group made the conscious decision that it was most important to help prepare and push as many kids on to college as possible. This was largely based on the view that as HJHS Principal Tafoya noted, “college has a seat for everyone,” and “there are programs existing to help first-generation college students succeed upon arriving in college.”

Further, as Anton noted in her comments, the term ‘college’ is often really an overly narrow term, since there are wide options for those in institutions of higher education. Of course, the UC is a preeminent research university, and state college systems are often seen as the trainers of the workforce in careers like teaching, nursing, social services, and law enforcement. The third stool, the community colleges, were seen by the Operation College working group as a path that could help with remedial programs for those with four-year college aspirations, but who may be behind academically. Further, as noted in early chapters, new economic realities show that at least some college is needed to gain employment in good paying middle class jobs. The Operation College

plan felt strongly about helping students understand the path and financial aid avenues to workforce and vocational training options of the community college system.

### General Observations

One of the most critical observations in my research, from being closely associated with the Operation College project, was the importance and success of the family engagement nights. From a purely simplistic and practical level, the element of inviting families to campus to enjoy a free, catered meal, and participate in a non-threatening, informative, and inviting venue to receive college information was critical. The numbers presented before and after showed that if a high school administration placed a significant effort to provide such service, families would indeed likely be interested.

As a personal observation, I witnessed several family engagement nights when families (in their native language) were able meet in smaller group settings of 30-40 people and discuss the basic information about college. As the Thomas Rivera research noted earlier, many parents were lacking basic and elementary knowledge about resources to attend college (Pachon & Estela, 2005). Most of those in attendance of the workshop I attended did not know about the landmark Cal Grant Entitlement program which guarantees up to \$12,500 annually for college for lower income and middle class students who graduate with at least a 2.0 GPA (California Student Aid Commission, 2008). Further, some attendees did not understand the basic difference between a grant and a loan, and did not know their immigration status has no effect on their child's

financial aid application. Lastly, most families did not know their child would most likely be eligible for the Cal Grant to pay for college only if they filled out the application before March 2 of their senior year in high school. This was a key component early on of the working group, based in large part because of the Pachon and Estela (2005) findings about misinformation about the college basics. The project wanted to ensure that if nothing else, families had a keen sense of the financial possibilities of college, especially with the Cal Grant Entitlement program.

Another key observation related to the research and the findings from the project was the fact that a small, but focused effort could lead to such an increased culture on campus about college opportunity and really help transition kids to higher education institutions. The paperwork and logistics are very complicated for first-generation would-be college students and their families navigating the path to college. However, with just one additional staff person, a dedicated administration, and community partners, HJHS was able to show that with a coordinated, researched, and disciplined plan, it could in fact deliver significant results.

Lastly, compared to the quantifiable metrics outlined earlier, whether the goal to increase the on-campus college-going culture was satisfied is not as easy to pinpoint. However, there were several notable elements highlighted by the interviewees that help paint a narrative of an increased college culture and higher educational prospects for HJHS students. As discussed in the literature review and the definitions of a college-going culture, “college talk” on campus is a critical element (McClafferty &

McDonough, 2002). The examples outlined by Principal Tafoya and then-student Osbourne of halls lined with college banners and college acceptance letters for HJHS students, and the example by Sidqe about colleges setting up information tables on the quad at lunch hour, helped reinforce college talk among students, staff, and administrators on campus. These examples, again while not easily measurable, show how small efforts could add up and seep into the culture on campus to inspire more college-going possibilities for the students, teachers, and staff.

#### State Implications

From a state and education policy perspective, this effort at HJHS and its evaluation could be useful for California State policymakers and local education leaders. This would especially be true with efforts and proposals to expand high school counseling services and discussions about how to best allocate such resources. In the past five years, three concrete examples were put forth related to this issue: the 2006-07 California State Budget allocated \$200 million for additional counselors in middle and high schools (California State Committee on Budget, 2006, Chapter 79); in 2006, then Democratic Candidate for Governor Phil Angelides advocated for doubling the number of high school guidance counselors (Marelieu & LaVelle, 2006); and in 2007-2008 California Assembly member Wilmer Amina Carter authored legislation to dramatically expand access to high school counselors to the ratio of one counselor per 250 students by 2012.

Each of the above examples raises the principal policy question for education administrators and policymakers, which was the essential test of the Operation College project. Is it wiser to use new guidance counselor monies to expand the existing system of high school counseling, or use the monies to focus on a specific college-going approach as was utilized in HJHS Operation College?

#### Concluding Thoughts

It is possible the lessons learned from the four-year pilot project could assist policymakers on how to best allocate increasingly scarce public dollars for high school counseling college efforts. The HJHS Operation College program did show that a solely dedicated college counselor position could make a major difference in increasing college participation rates among high schools with low college-going rates.

The overarching answer may come down to the old adage of quality v. quantity. In other words, is it better for an underserved, urban high school about to receive new counselor funding to place this individual into the rotation in an attempt to lower the counselor-student ratios and provide general counseling services, which would include among other duties, college transition guidance. Or conversely, should such a high school allocate monies as HJHS did in their Operation College pilot project. From the case study findings, if a high school were flush with new monies to expand counseling services and a goal to increase their college-going culture and help transition more students to pursue a higher education, an Operation College type of approach may pay the most dividends.

## REFERENCES

Alvarez, M., & Sidqe, S. (2006). *Operation college program overview and fact sheet*.

Unpublished document. Hiram Johnson High School, Sacramento, CA.

California State Committee on Budget. (2006). *AB 1802*. Retrieved from

[http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/05-06/bill/asm/ab\\_1801-](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/05-06/bill/asm/ab_1801-1850/ab_1802_bill_20060719_chaptered.html)

[1850/ab\\_1802\\_bill\\_20060719\\_chaptered.html](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/05-06/bill/asm/ab_1801-1850/ab_1802_bill_20060719_chaptered.html)

California Student Aid Commission. (2008). *Cal Grants home page*. Retrieved from

<http://www.calgrants.org>

The Campaign for College Opportunity. (2005a). *Ensuring that the next generation of*

*Californians has a chance to go to college*. Retrieved from

<http://www.collegecampaign.org>

Carter, W. A. (2007, February 10). *AB 491*. Retrieved from

[http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/asm/ab\\_0451-](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/asm/ab_0451-0500/ab_491_bill_20070220_introduced.html)

[0500/ab\\_491\\_bill\\_20070220\\_introduced.html](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/asm/ab_0451-0500/ab_491_bill_20070220_introduced.html)

Ceja, M. (2004). *Chicana college aspirations and the role of parents: Developing*

*education resiliency*. Sacramento: California State University, Sacramento,

Department of Public Policy and Administration.

Harvard Graduate School of Education. (2011, February). *Pathways to prosperity project*.

Cambridge, MA: Author.

- Hossler, D., Schmit, J., & Vesper, N. (1999). *Going to college: How social, economic and educational factors influence the decisions students make*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Immerwahr, J. (2003). *With diploma in hand: Hispanic high school seniors talk about their future*. San Jose, CA: The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.
- Johnson, H. P., & Reed, D. (2007). *Can California import enough college graduates to meet workforce needs?* San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California.
- King, J. E. (1996). *The decision to go to college: Attitudes and experiences associated with college attendance among low-income students*. Retrieved from ERIC. (ED398775)
- Marelieu, J., & LaVelle, P. J. (2006, June 17). Governor, Angelides discuss education plans during separate visits. *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. Retrieved from [http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20060617/news\\_7m17govrace.html](http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20060617/news_7m17govrace.html)
- McClafferty, K. A., & McDonough, P. (2002). *What is a college culture? Facilitating college preparation through organizational change*. Retrieved from ERIC. (ED471504)
- McDonough, P. (1997). *Choosing colleges*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- McDonough, P. (2005). *Counseling and college counseling in America's high schools*. Los Angeles: UCLA Department of Education.

- Oasis/Community IMPACT. (2006). *College access: From the inside out*. Retrieved from <http://www.inpathways.net/ipcnlibrary/ViewBiblio.aspx?aid=1621>
- Pachon, H., & Estela, M. Z. (2005). *Perspectives of college costs, benefits and financial aid among California Latino youth*. Los Angeles: The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute.
- Sacramento City Unified School District. (2010). *School facts and accountability information, 2009-2010*. Retrieved from <http://sacramentocity.schoolwisepress.com/home/>
- Sidqe, S. (2010). *Operation college results sheet*. [Unpublished document]. Hiram Johnson High School, Sacramento, CA.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2005). *College degree nearly doubles annual earnings, Census Bureau reports*. Press Release. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/press-releases/archives>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2005). *Press release college degree nearly doubles annual earnings*. Census Bureau reports. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/press-releases/archives>
- US Census Bureau. (2010). *State and county quickfacts, Sacramento*. Retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06000.html>