REPORT

ALLIANCE
College-Ready Public Schools
Where Exceptional is the Rule

ALLIANCE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM:

Paving the Road from College Access to College Success

According to a Pell Institute study,[1] 9 percent of students from low income families graduate with a bachelor's degree by age 24, compared to 77 percent for high income students.

9%

of low income students complete college

77%

of affluent students complete college

1. "Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States." *The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education,* Penn Ahead-Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy (2015).

MOVING FROM COLLEGE ACCESS TO COLLEGE SUCCESS

ALLIANCE College-Ready Public Schools
Where **Exceptional** is the **Rule**

Dear Colleagues,

In 2004, a small group of Los Angeles-based, public school educators and civic leaders founded Alliance College-Ready Public Schools. Driven by a belief that all young people could excel academically, they set out to prove that operating excellent public schools, even in Los Angeles' most underserved communities, did not have to be an exception, but could be the rule. Today, Alliance is one of the largest and most successful public charter school networks in the nation, educating 13,000 middle and high school scholars in low income communities across Los Angeles.

Since Alliance's founding, 95% of our scholars have graduated from high school, with nearly all accepted to a two or four-year college. While Alliance graduates were accepted to college at rates that outpace local and national averages for low income scholars, we have been disheartened to learn that a significant number are not continuing on to earn a college degree. We have also learned this is not unique to Alliance scholars, but reflects a pattern for low income minority students across the nation.

College success—like secondary school success—should not be pre-determined by a young person's background or zip code. Indeed, increasing college completion rates for scholars like those who attend Alliance schools is not only a moral and social justice imperative, but it is vital for the long-term health of our economy. By 2020, 65% of the job openings in the U.S. will require post-secondary education.[2] Quite simply, we must prepare our youth for the jobs of the future.

As we enter our second decade of operating high-performing public schools, we have set a new audacious goal: **75% of Alliance alumni will graduate from a four-year college.** One crucial piece of attaining that goal is the Alliance Mentorship Program (AMP). A peer-based solution that empowers our alumni to help one another, AMP was established in 2012 to ensure our scholars made the critical transition from senior year in high school to their sophomore year in college. By bridging the gap to college, AMP helps our alumni stay on the path to increased college completion rates.

This report is written for teachers, counselors, leaders, and school districts, as well as for college admissions officers, first-generation program administrators, and education policymakers. In it, we highlight the key components of Alliances' successful and replicable peer-to-peer mentorship program, provide program statistics, and offer recommendations for universities who welcome first-generation scholars onto their campuses. Our hope is that this report challenges all of us into action—to expand college access and college completion to a growing and diverse student population in our city and across our nation.

Dan Katzir,
President & CEO
Alliance College-Ready Public Schools

75%
of Alliance alumni will graduate from a four-year college.

2. https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/recovery-job-growth-and-education-requirements-through-2020/

BRIDGING THE ROAD TO COLLEGE

Of Alliance alumni who attend a four-year university,

43%

earn a bachelor's degree.

Nationally, low income students are less likely to earn a college degree than their more affluent peers. Only 9% of low income students earn a college degree as compared to 77% of their upper income peers.[3]

At Alliance, 95% of our scholars graduate from high school and are admitted to college. Of those, 77% are admitted to a four-year college or university, with 23% admitted to a two-year post-secondary institution. Of Alliance alumni who attend a four-year university, 43% earn a bachelor's degree.

However, when you include Alliance high school graduates who attend a community college, or who get into any college but don't attend (a phenomenon called "summer melt") only 27 percent of Alliance alumni earn a bachelor's degree. While this is three times the college completion rate for low income students, it is far below our aspiration of 75% and far below what is required for our alumni to compete in the global information economy.

77%

admitted to a 4-year college

23%

admitted to a 2-year college

3. "Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States." *The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education*, Penn Ahead-Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy (2015).

Identifying the Roadblocks

Through a detailed analysis of data from the National Student Clearinghouse[4] as well as our own internal surveys and focus groups with Alliance alumni, we identified two critical points at which the drop-off occurs and our alumni abandon plans to attend college: 1) The summer before the first year of college, known as summer melt, and 2) throughout their freshman year in college.

Summer Melt

Nationally, when low income minority students get into college, up to **40% don't show up for the first day of class.**[5]

There are multiple reasons for this harsh reality. Some are straightforward, such as the lack of access to financial resources. Less obvious, but often more of a hindrance to a low income student's success in college, is the absence of social support networks taken for granted by college-bound middle and upper income students.

During the summer months prior to freshman year, students often miss key deadlines or fail to complete forms in their entirety, either for admissions or for financial aid, and suddenly find themselves cut off from attending college. First-generation students are often pressed to meet additional financial or family obligations that compound the challenges of managing the summer transition from high school to college.

Many students find themselves on their own for the first time navigating a complex bureaucracy without the support of their high school teachers and counselors. While family members may support them with encouragement, they often lack the resources, experience, and time to usher their young college-bound students through the transition process.

Despite beating the odds for first-generation college acceptance, one in five Alliance scholars ultimately does not show up for the first day of college.

Freshman Year Assimilation

As they enter college, Alliance alumni—like first-generation students across the country—struggle with family responsibilities, difficult financial obligations, social isolation, and the "imposter syndrome" in which they believe they do not deserve to be at college.

The unique challenges faced by first-generation students are a heavy overlay to the increased academic rigor and challenges of newfound freedoms and independence experienced by most college freshmen. With few social peers on campus and a weak support system at home, Alliance scholars often fail to apply for or take full advantage of existing, on-campus support programs. A first semester midterm exam failure or missing a registration deadline for next semester's classes can mark a catastrophic setback for a student who does not know of available resources or simply believes the set-back proves that he or she does not "deserve" to be at college.

For Alliance alumni these compounding pressures result in 23% of our college freshmen not continuing on to their sophomore year of college.[6] In comparison, of students nationwide who started college in fall 2014, 28% didn't persist to the fall of 2015.[7]

Up to

40%

of low income minority students, who are admitted to college, don't show up the first day.

4. The National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) is a database of college student attendance and graduation data from nearly every two and four year college across the nation.
5. SDP Summer Melt Handbook: A Guide to Investigating and Responding to Summer Melt. https://sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/summer-melt-handbook
6. The National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) is a database of college student attendance and graduation data from nearly every two and four year college across the nation.
7. National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Snapshot Report, Persistence: https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SnapshotReport22-PersistenceRetention.pdf

WALKING THE ROAD TOGETHER

"Hopefully I get to mentor future students and make their transition to college easier, just like Blanca did for me."

JOSE LUIS HERRERA
Alliance Smidt Tech High School '16, UCLA '20

To mitigate the lack of social support for scholars who are first-generation college students, Alliance developed a peer-to-peer support network—the Alliance Mentorship Program (AMP).

The program sets out to intervene at the most critical time for our graduating scholars—in the summer before the first year of college and throughout freshman year. The program is also designed to provide a sustainable system to get our alumni over the first year hurdles that often impede college completion.

AMP pairs successful Alliance alumni in their second or third year of college with incoming freshmen who have been accepted to the same post secondary institution. To reduce summer melt and increase the first year completion rates, the mentor/mentee relationship is established in the spring before the incoming college students graduate from high school. The relationship continues through the mentee's freshman year.

In only a few years, AMP has shown strong results, significantly reducing summer melt and increasing first year persistence rates for Alliance alumni.

Alliance alumni mentors adopt a cohort of five to eight incoming freshmen. The mentees meet their mentors in May of their senior year at an Alliance-wide AMP College Prep Summit. Mentors use the day to build relationships with their mentees and outline practical next steps to ensure incoming freshmen stay on track and show up to college in the fall.

Mentors stay in touch during the summer months by setting up in-person meetings, as well as through social media and by texting. In turn, mentees are encouraged to reach out to their mentor if help is needed or questions arise. Financial aid disbursement and registering for classes are the most common questions asked over the summer months.

Mentors and mentees meet formally as a group four times during the course of freshman year and cover topics most pertinent to the time of year. For example, prior to the start of the school year, students review time management strategies and receive an introduction to available academic, social, and health-related campus resources. In November, mentors take mentees through the FAFSA application process to continue financial aid into their second year of college.

AMP has the unique quality of benefiting both mentees and mentors. Mentees receive much needed assistance to support them through a successful first year of college. Mentors' involvement also strengthens their own commitment to continue and graduate from college and provides them with a leadership opportunity. AMP mentors take part in professional development to prepare them for their role in the program, as well as attend sessions focused on developing life-skills.

Professional development sessions cover a variety of topics, including time and financial management skills, how to find and successfully apply for internships, and how to write a compelling resume and LinkedIn profile. In addition, mentors earn a modest stipend to help with books and incidentals while in college. Many mentees, in turn, become mentors in their second year of college, supporting the next class of incoming freshmen. The mentee/mentor progression helps to build an organic and self-sustaining support system throughout an AMP member's time in college.

Because AMP mentors are also first-generation students from the same communities in Los Angeles as the students they are mentoring, they can more readily identify challenges and solutions. Having mentors from similar backgrounds and communities also provides a level of trust and credibility, allowing mentees to openly share their challenges, and in turn, facilitating appropriate solutions for the new college student.

"Being an AMP Mentor helped me prepare for the internship search process. Through the AMP Networking Night, I was able to make a connection that ultimately led to a summer internship at PriceWaterhouseCooper."

EVANDER HERRERA
Alliance Ouchi-O'Donovan
6-12 Complex, '15,
California State University,
Dominguez Hills '19

MEASURING OUR PROGRESS

AMP is a peer-driven program, but it is also data driven. Mentors collect information on how their mentees progress at every step of the way and share this information with their Alliance high school Student Transition Coordinator—a staff position at Alliance high schools—with whom the mentees completed the college application process, including school and program selection as well as financial aid.

The Alliance Student Transition Coordinator can evaluate the likelihood of a mentee's college persistence by using a well-defined set of criteria. A number of key data points are used to determine if a mentee requires additional assistance (see chart below). When mentees struggle, the mentor and the Student Transition Coordinator can provide specific advice or refer the mentee to appropriate resources to support the needs of the mentee.

Key Indicators for College Persistence

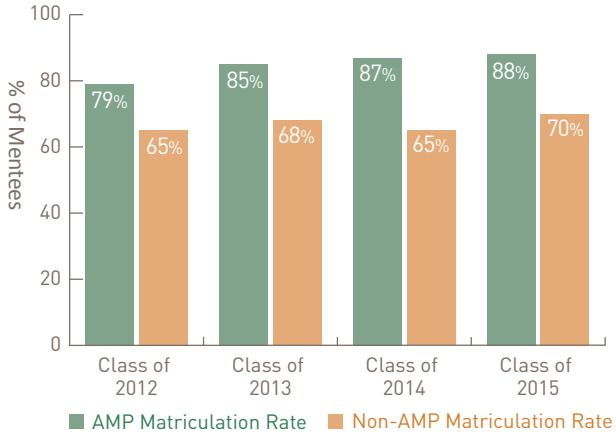
Category	*Student is enrolled and is not experiencing any barriers to persisting.*	*Student is making an effort to persist, but feels uncertain about ability to follow through.*	*Student is experiencing significant barriers to persisting and / or is not making an effort.*
Academic	Enrolled in 14-17 units in a semester and on track to earn B.A. within 4-6 years or transfer within 3 years Has no concerns about enrolling next semester Cumulative GPA is 2.67 or higher	Enrolled in 12-14 units in a semester and on track to earn B.A. within 4-6 years or transfer within 4 years Has no major concerns with next semester enrollment Cumulative GPA is 2.11-2.66	Enrolled in less than 12 units in a semester and is not on track to earn B.A. within 6 years or transfer in less than 5 years Has concerns about enrolling next semester Cumulative GPA is below 2.0
Financial	Has a balance due of no more than $2,000 owed to university and a solid plan to cover the balance Works 0-10 hours per week off campus or less than 20 on campus Has completed plans to renew FAFSA or Dream Act application	Has a balance due of $2,000-$5,000 with a plan to cover the balance Works 0-15 hours per week off campus	Has a balance due of over $5,000 and has an unrealistic plan or has no plan to cover balance Works 15 or more hours per week off campus
Housing/ Commuting	Has a stable and renewal housing plan If off-campus, commute is less than 30 minutes	Is somewhat concerned with commuting (30 to 60 minutes) Lack of personal transportation Difficulty studying at home	Is very concerned with commuting (60 minutes per day)

AMP data also informs Alliance school-based program decisions. Alliance collects transcript data from AMP participants to better understand where academic deficiencies exist. This data informs improvements to AMP, as well as Alliance's academic and counseling high school programs. For example, two Alliance high schools—Alliance Marc & Eva Stern Math and Science School and Alliance Ted K. Tajima High School—used college remedial class data collected by Alliance to offer new math and English college preparatory classes designed to prepare their seniors for the college placement exams. The six-week Saturday classes helped Alliance scholars place in higher-level college classes, thereby avoiding the need to take non-credit remedial courses and increasing the odds they will complete college.

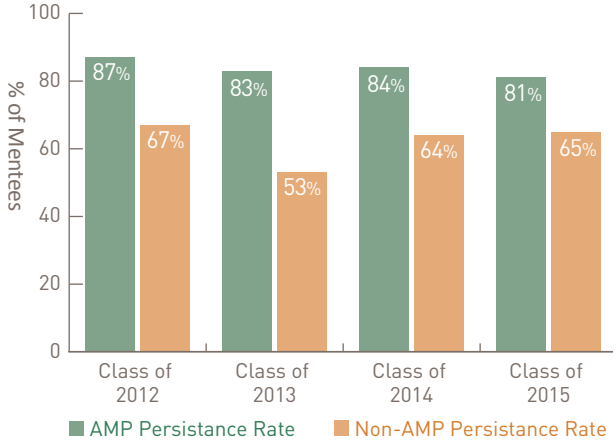
Successfully Crossing the Bridge

Alliance alumni who are part of AMP continue on to their sophomore year at far greater rates than Alliance alumni who attend the same university, but do not participate in AMP. For the most recent two years for which we have data (classes of 2014-2015 with 400 mentees and classes of 2015-2016 with 500 mentees), AMP supported 900 mentees across 12 colleges and universities. Another 950 alumni attended these same universities, but did not participate in AMP.

College Matriculation AMP vs Non-AMP*



College Persistence to Sophomore Year



*Non-AMP cohort is composed of all non-AMP participants attending an AMP supported college.

Where We Go Next

Energized by the proven success of AMP, Alliance plans to expand the peer-to-peer initiative as a core strategy to help us reach our goal of 75% college completion from a four-year university for Alliance alumni.

This includes continuing to improve the professional development curriculum for alumni mentors, giving them greater tools to help their mentees; more and earlier contacts between mentors and Alliance high school seniors; and expanding AMP to colleges outside of Southern California, starting with our top feeder colleges in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Importantly, AMP does not duplicate existing college support systems, but rather is designed to help students better navigate college systems that already exist.

As we seek to dramatically improve our college completion rates, we are committed to:

Measuring Success Beyond Freshman Year: By nurturing and creating opportunities for informal networks beyond a mentee's freshman year, Alliance hopes to build on the natural support systems created during freshman year to strengthen college persistence. Anecdotally, we already have evidence that those freshmen mentees who become mentors in sophomore year have higher persistence rates in subsequent years than students who do not remain connected to their AMP peers. We will also build our tracking and monitoring of AMP participants compared to non-AMP participants after exiting the program to evaluate the long-term impacts.

Using AMP Data to Inform Middle & High School Programming: Importantly, the data collected on mentee successes and challenges, as well as information gleaned from the close relationships developed with mentees and mentors, provides important information for Alliance schools, informing adjustments to curriculum, instruction and programs that better prepare Alliance scholars for college.

The ultimate measure of AMP's success will be four year college completion rates for our scholars. By using matriculation and persistence data as early indicators, Alliance is moving the needle on the life changing accomplishment of college completion.

BUILDING MORE BRIDGES: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HIGH SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Buy-in and commitment from both the central office and school sites are important for success.

The purpose of AMP is not only to graduate more Alliance scholars from college, but to also develop a replicable model by which more students at all K-12 schools can graduate from a post-secondary institution. AMP has shown strong and consistent results, dramatically changing first-year college completion rates for historically disadvantaged students. **As a relatively low-cost program, at about $200 per alumnus served (including the full-time staff who run the program), the peer-to-peer model can be replicated by other schools and school systems around the country.**

Central Office Staffing and Support

The role of the central office staff is to liaise with the school staff in order to identify students for the program and to identify and train first cohort mentors. Central office staff also serve as the single point of contact for mentors and mentees in the program, and manage a centralized data collection system.

Data Systems

At the district or network level, measuring and tracking college persistence needs to be a priority at the highest levels of the organization. Fortunately, the National Student Clearinghouse is easily accessed by secondary institutions interested in developing alumni tracking and programming efforts. At least one dedicated central office staff member should be focused on overseeing the data system and supporting the school-based college counseling team.

The High School Site Commitment

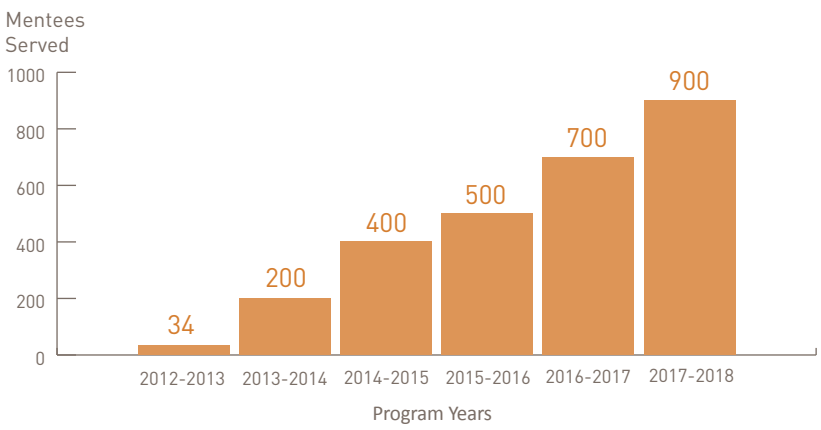
At the school site, both the school leader and college counseling staff must be committed to the success of the program, identifying and recruiting high school seniors into the program as part of the college application and acceptance process.

At Alliance, what ultimately changed the paradigm at the school site were two initiatives: First, Alliance created a Student Transition Coordinator position dedicated to working with scholars on the college application process, including college selection and financial aid applications, and recruitment into AMP. Second, and equally important, was setting expectations for school leaders and college counselors around specific improvement targets for college admissions, matriculation, persistence, and completion.

Getting Started

While AMP has grown to serve 900 mentees from 15 Alliance high schools who attend 14 colleges in 2017-18, we began with 34 mentees at one Alliance high school who attended two colleges. We recommend that other programs start small and scale up over time. Begin by identifying one or two high schools and one or two colleges with concentrations of existing alumni and develop the mentorship program there. Use pilot years to refine how to recruit mentors and what training and support will be provided. Creating a successful program in the pilot phase will build pride and excitement that will make recruiting additional schools and alumni possible for future years.

AMP Mentee Participation: Five Year Growth



BUILDING MORE BRIDGES: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

As a result of gaining in-depth knowledge from AMP participants, Alliance has developed a set of recommendations for colleges interested in making the matriculation process more welcoming, and developing and/or modifying first year support programs for first-generation college students.

Change the Timing of Financial Aid

First, ensure students receive their initial financial aid packages prior to the college commit deadline. Second, lower the cash required before financial aid is disbursed (e.g., enrollment deposit and housing deposit) for first-generation and low income students. For many low income students who rely on financial aid, these early deposits, which make up a small portion of a college's revenue, are effectively a "Do Not Enter" sign. These fees could be reduced, waived, or restructured to align with timing of financial aid disbursements. Finally, earlier release of financial aid disbursements will assist students in paying early fees and purchasing must-have supplies for the first semester of college.

In 2017-2018, AMP supported Alliance high school graduates attending the following 14 colleges:

El Camino College
Cal State Fullerton
Pasadena City College
Cal State East Bay
East Los Angeles College
UC Merced
Cal State Dominguez Hills
UC Riverside
Cal State Northridge
UC Irvine
Cal State Los Angeles
UC Los Angeles
Cal State Long Beach
Mt. St. Mary's

Implement Programs to Support First-Generation Student Success

While many colleges and universities offer campus resources and programs that are beneficial to first-generation students, Alliance mentors spend much of their time assisting students in navigating large campus bureaucracies to help mentees find programs that are often housed in different divisions or administrative offices and that typically do not coordinate the timing or delivery of services. For first-generation students who already feel "out of place" on a college campus, these large and disjointed bureaucracies often make otherwise useful resources and support systems inaccessible.

By identifying first-generation students through the college application process, universities can and should reach out to students in the spring and summer before freshman year to share information about campus resources specific to first-generation students. In addition to email, a number of colleges have found ways to engage with students through other communications vehicles such as texting and social media. Where possible, universities should offer pre-orientation programs the summer before freshman year specifically designed for first-generation students.

Help with Housing

Housing programs can be particularly hard to navigate, and should be explicitly wrapped into support for first-generation students. Colleges should consider providing additional personalized advisement to ensure students complete the process properly.

Automatic Enrollment in Key Courses

Finally, offering automatic class enrollment or priority registration for core required courses would help smooth the transition into the first and second semester for first-generation students and contribute to on-time college completion.

LOOKING DOWN THE ROAD

By 2020,

65%

of the job openings in the U.S. will require a post-secondary education. Ignoring the college dropout crisis is neither economically tenable nor morally acceptable.

Over the past decade, high school graduation and college attendance rates have risen steadily, yet college completion rates have not kept pace. With the U.S. economy projected to grow the number of jobs requiring post-secondary education to 65% by 2020, ignoring the college dropout crisis is neither economically tenable nor morally acceptable.

We have clear data that shows us when and why first-generation college students fall off the road to college graduation. Both secondary and post-secondary institutions can play an important role in removing barriers that smooth the transition to college success for at-risk students.

AMP provides a unique bridge between high school and college, significantly improving the transition into and through the pivotal first year of post-secondary education. By supplementing high school counseling programs and existing college resources with socially and culturally-relevant assistance and encouragement from peers, AMP has demonstrated significant progress in increasing college persistence rates for first-generation college students. The potential exists for significant expansion—not only at Alliance, but also at all schools and school systems that serve a historically disadvantaged student populations.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to operate a network of small, high-performing public charter high schools and middle schools in low income communities in California with historically underperforming schools, that will annually demonstrate student academic achievement growth, and graduate students ready for success in college.

Our 13,000 Scholars:

98%	94%	17%	10%
Latino or African American	*Free and Reduced Meal Program*	*English Language Learners*	*Special Needs*

ALLIANCE
College-Ready Public Schools
Where **Exceptional** is the **Rule**

Thank you to our generous sponsors who have supported the initial design and ongoing development of the Alliance Mentorship Program.

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Alliance College-Ready Public Schools

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