

BELIEVING THE COLLEGE DREAM

A young Black woman with dark hair, wearing a bright orange t-shirt and large hoop earrings, is the central focus. She is sitting at a desk in a classroom, with her right arm raised high. She has a green wristband on her right wrist. In the background, other students are visible, some with their hands raised, suggesting an interactive classroom environment. The lighting is bright and natural, creating a positive and engaged atmosphere.

EDUCATOR GUIDE

ECMC

BELIEVING THE COLLEGE DREAM: EDUCATOR GUIDE

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PREFACE



Believing the College Dream is a curriculum guide that supports teachers, counselors, and community organization staffs in their work to increase the expectations of attending college by prospective low-income, first-generation college students in grades 4-8. The lessons and workshops strive to prepare students and their families for successful transitions along the academic pipeline from elementary school through middle school, high school and on to postsecondary education.

Although most parents aspire to economic and social success for their children, low-income parents of first-generation college students often don't have access to the resources necessary to help their children participate in higher education. This guide was created as an early intervention measure to help bridge wide disparities of income, race and ethnicity that exist in access to and success in higher education.

ECMC and the University of California, Berkeley, Center for Educational Partnerships previously collaborated on Realizing the College Dream, a college access and success curriculum geared primarily to middle schools and high

schools. Since 2004, hundreds of thousands of students have been taught this curriculum. However, leading researchers have shown that college information should start even earlier. Some of their findings are featured in the box below.

Students who decide early to go to college are more likely to enter higher education.

Families that lack college information or resources are less likely to send their children to college.

Schools where counselors collaborate with other staff members and students send more students to college.¹

¹ Allison C. Paolini, "School Counselors Promoting College and Career Readiness for High School Students," *Journal of School Counseling*, 2019, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1203651.pdf>



BELIEVING THE COLLEGE DREAM

A 2009 American Psychological Association study concluded that thinking about college as being within reach (i.e., learning about opportunities for financial aid) or out of reach (i.e., hearing about the enormous costs of higher education) appears to affect achievement goals in young students from low-income families. The study shows that children as young as 11 plan to spend more time studying and have greater expectations of their own academic performance when they view attending college as a realistic possibility (thanks to financial aid). However, this positive effect is not seen in children whose grades are already low, suggesting that families need to be given information about the financial accessibility of college early on before students fall too far behind.²

ECMC partnered with the University of California, Berkeley, Center for Educational Partnerships to create Believing the College Dream as a resource to address these issues. The curriculum begins in elementary school and follows students into middle and high school. It encourages students to believe in themselves and their ability to succeed in school; enables students to identify adults they can trust to support their educational journey; and helps empower families and communities with the information and perspective they need to support their children on the road to success.³

Families and communities are both stakeholders and valuable resources in their children's futures. Family members and/or other trusted adults provide continuity throughout a young student's education. Students will learn to appreciate and recognize the support and knowledge available to them from family members and other important people in their lives, whether or not these individuals attended college.

² Mesmin Destin and Daphna Oyserman, "From Assets to School Outcomes: How Finances Shape Children's Perceived Possibilities and Intentions," *Psychological Science*, 20,3 (2009), 10 March 2009

³ Dokuka S, Valeeva D, Yudkevich M (2020) How academic achievement spreads: The role of distinct social networks in academic performance diffusion. *PLoS ONE* 15(7): e0236737.

BELIEVING THE COLLEGE DREAM IS DIVIDED INTO THREE SECTIONS

Sections A-G introduce a set of lessons for students that contain the following elements: introduction, learning goals, target audience, timing, materials needed, activities, supplemental materials, curriculum and skills standards, references, bibliography and websites (as appropriate). Section H focuses on parent meetings and conversations. Section I, the Appendices, contains resources for use throughout the curriculum.



Sections A-G. Focus on Students

This section focuses on students. Each lesson is based on a belief statement for that section of the curriculum. The lessons can be used in their entirety in the order presented, or adapted to fit your students' specific needs. In addition to material dealing with developing a college going culture, each lesson is aligned with the national elementary and middle school curriculum and skills standards in English/language arts, mathematics, social studies and/or technology. The standards are included in Appendix A of this guide.

Educators are encouraged to create a system to collect and organize student work that best fits their instructional strategies. One idea is for students to store their work in a binder kept in the classroom or in an online classroom portal so that they can start to build a portfolio. A portfolio will assist students in completing Reflection Activities and can be presented during the suggested culmination activity (Friends and Family Night).

Many student sections contain a Word Wall, which you are encouraged to replicate in your classroom. The words will be used throughout the lesson they are in and may be repeated in subsequent sections. We suggest you create a Word Wall prior to the lesson and refer to it often. Include these words in your spelling list, allow for students to suggest additional words, and check for student understanding when words are introduced during the lesson.



Section H. Guides

This section contains guides for five parent/community meetings, or conversations. These guides are meant to encourage intimate community gatherings where groups of people engage in dialogue for the purpose of exchanging ideas and providing support. These parent gatherings, or Community Conversations, move away from the educator as-expert parent-meeting model by embracing parents' thoughts and experiences as central to any conversation.



Section I. Appendices

This section contains curriculum and skills standards, specific implementation options for both inside and outside of the traditional contained classroom, ideas on how to enhance to curriculum impact and links to other resources to help create a college-going culture.