



Helios College Knowing and Going (CKG)
Annual Evaluation:
Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Purpose of the CKG Project

The College Knowing and Going Project (CKG) is a partnership led by Education Forward Arizona to develop a comprehensive, data-driven, student-centered approach to college readiness at 15 high schools in Arizona. This past year the project has also been supported by partners Earn to Learn (EL), Northern Arizona College Resource Center (NACRC), and most recently Education Forward Arizona. The program aims to create a school-wide culture in which stakeholders work collaboratively to encourage low-income, first-generation, underserved Arizona students to graduate high school ready for college.

Education Forward Arizona establishes strategies with CKG schools focused on increasing students' postsecondary outcomes through the development of College Readiness Teams (CRTs), which provide an organizational framework for ongoing implementation of school-wide goals, strategic planning, and assessment of postsecondary outcomes. CRTs are responsible for increasing access to standardized test preparation, the percent of students completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and the number of students who apply to, matriculate at, and succeed in 2- and 4-year colleges.

CRTs leverage AdviseAZ AmeriCorps members, serving as College Access Advisors, and influential high school students, serving as Student Ambassadors, to support school-wide college access initiatives and provide direct services to students. For the 2020–2021 academic year, 14 AmeriCorps members were selected to serve across 12 CKG schools and 23 Student Ambassadors were selected to serve across 14 CKG schools.

CKG's ultimate goal, or impact, is:

To increase the percentage of Arizonans completing college and to decrease postsecondary educational inequity in the state, leading to a higher quality of life for all Arizonans.

This is the desired result, 10 to 15 years out, of the program. The other long-term goal for the CKG program is to promote educational equity by increasing the number of Arizona's most underserved students who attend and succeed in college.

College Knowing and Going (CKG) School Site Descriptions

For this past year, 2020 to 2021, there were a total of fifteen CKG school sites. This was the first full academic year that the CKG model was implemented at each school site. The following Exhibit A. provides some information describing each CKG school site for the past year as of May 2021. According to this information, there were a total of 3,703 seniors at these fifteen sites who were the focus of CKG programming. Of the ten sites that reported, 1,889 of 2,212 seniors (85%) completed a 2- and or 4-year college admission application.

Exhibit A. CKG High School Sites 2020–2021

High School Sites	Total Enrollments Freshman to Junior	Total Enrollments Senior	Number of On-Time Graduates	Total Number of Counselor and Teacher Staff	Total Number of Seniors Completing a 2-year and or 4-year College Application
Ash Fork HS	59	16	17	7	21
Casteel HS	1,532	454	450	148	No Report
Catalina HS	381	128	83	67	73
Cienega HS	1,406	523	516	96	290
Desert View HS	1,466	376	308	130	438
Flagstaff HS	1,218	348	337	79	207
Globe HS	376	132	128	34	No Report
Lake Havasu HS	1,295	389	387	83	No Report
Miami Jr. — Sr. HS	194	59	60	37	78
Nogales HS	1,278	381	375	3	No Report
Round Valley HS	307	80	80	26	85
Summit HS	53	29	28	11	9
Sunnyside HS	1,589	419	349	115	495
Winslow HS	450	135	126	34	No Report
Yuma HS	880	234	192	55	193
TOTALS	12,484	3,703	3,436	1,010	1,889

Key Findings from the Year 1 Evaluation

Evaluation Design

The evaluation focuses on program implementation, with an interest in documenting strategies and identifying opportunities for further program development and improvement to the implementation of the CKG intervention model. The evaluation is guided by the questions below, some of which center on program implementation and others on program outcomes.

Implementation Evaluation Questions

- In what ways does the CKG program increase schools' capacity to support college preparation and access efforts?
- How do CRTs identify and address gaps to improve postsecondary outcomes for students?
- How have CRTs increased collaboration within schools to support postsecondary planning with students?
- What kinds of services/supports do students receive through the CKG program?
- How does the College Access Student Ambassador program support college preparedness and enrollment efforts in schools?
- What support is provided to ensure CRTs have the support needed within schools to initiate and sustain college access efforts in schools after current funding ends?

Outcome Focus Questions

- Does CKG provide the support students need to pursue postsecondary options?
- Has CKG contributed to increased rates of enrollment at 2- and 4-year colleges immediately following high school among high school seniors (those graduating in spring 2020) at CKG schools?

Data Collection and Analysis

To answer the implementation evaluation questions above, a mixed-methods, quasi-experimental design was used including a review of program documents, administration of online surveys, and telephone interviews. Surveys and interview protocols were developed with the CKG staff. CKG staff were responsible for data collection and provided data files to the evaluator for analysis. Documents such as professional development certifications, school action plans, and creative content developed by CRT members and Ambassadors including videos and social media posts were also reviewed. The CKG program staff were responsible for data collection and provided the evaluator with files for use in analyses. Descriptive analyses were used to examine most data for this report. To measure the outcome focused on college enrollment rates, the CKG program staff worked with each school to obtain demographic information on seniors at each site as well as obtained National Student Clearinghouse data that tracks enrollments into college. The analysis of this enrollment outcome data is primarily

descriptive and includes the application of log linear analysis to conduct a preliminary analysis to explore if the proportions of college enrollment at each site and at two time periods are significantly different.

Limitations

The main purpose of this evaluation report is to provide information to CKG program staff and leadership that will lead to improving the implementation of the CKG model. The reader is cautioned that for the process level evaluation CRT member surveys were conducted at the mid-year and at the end of the year and are not matched by survey participant. The same is true for the Ambassador survey activities. In addition, response rates at both time points were different with CRT member survey respondents fewer at the end-of-year time period. While results are presented describing seniors graduating from CKG school sites and enrolling into a 2- or 4-year college, the evaluation is not designed to isolate the effects of the CKG model as the only factor that might be influencing an outcome. Finally, the school year 2020-2021 was the first full school year that the CKG model has been implemented in these school sites. The staff at these school sites are new to implementing these strategies and that provides another reason to be cautious in attributing a difference on an outcome to the CKG model.

Implementation Findings

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Implementation

Throughout 2020-2021 surveys and interviews with CRT members and School Ambassadors resulted in respondents identifying consistent challenges with reaching students and holding events such as college fairs, college reach, and school assemblies due to COVID-19. Most respondents did not suggest the pandemic had impacted the goals they formed but instead changed their approach to the work due to the virtual environment, which had delayed progress toward meeting some goals. Many also reported that college access and readiness efforts are not being prioritized by schools due to immediate needs related to the pandemic such as remote learning, developing a reopening plan, and staff and student safety. Such sentiments were particularly prominent in discussions about support from principals for college readiness and access efforts.

As the pandemic continued through the school year, the impacts on school staff, students and members of these communities continued. The evaluation design for Year One did not allow for closer examination of this issue. Relevant to this project is that there was a significant overall decrease in enrollments to Arizona community colleges in 2020. For the 2021-2022 school year it is difficult to predict in what ways the pandemic and responses to the pandemic will impact how the CKG model is implemented.

Implementation Aims:

- ***CKG program increases schools' capacity to support college preparation and access.***
- ***College Access Student Ambassador program supports college preparedness and enrollment efforts.***

As mentioned earlier in this report, 2020-2021 was the first full year for CKG sites to begin implementing strategies to support college preparation and access. Results from surveys with CRT members and Ambassadors indicate a wide range of progress across the CKG sites. The assumption is that the work of the CRT and the work of the Ambassador are key drivers that influence a school sites' capacity to support college preparation and access. In terms of how CRTs are functioning, across all sites the only areas that were ranked as a concern by the majority of respondents at the end of the year were:

- A lack of shared decision-making with a balanced influence of all team members.
- A lack of high-level engagement from all team members.
- A lack of regular attendance to CRT meetings by all members.
- A lack of assigning multiple meeting roles prior to the meeting to enhance meeting effectiveness.

Attention in 2021-2022 needs to continue on supporting CRTs to function effectively and to improve how CRT members are engaged and valued.

The Ambassador role is another key strategy to increase the schools' capacity to support college preparation and access. Ambassadors were in 14 of the 15 CKG sites. Ambassadors reported that they worked with the CRT Coordinator most often in their role and 95% of all Ambassadors felt strongly supported by their CRT Coordinator. Ambassadors are given twelve Milestones that they are asked to focus on completing during the year. These Milestones include specific activities that Ambassadors can do to better support overall college preparedness and enrollment efforts. Ambassadors are provided financial incentives in fulfillment of their role at each site. At the end of the year, 86% of the Ambassador respondents (n=21) strongly agreed/agreed that the Milestones did reflect how they would want to support their peers in college-going efforts.

At the end of the year, Ambassadors (n=21) reported spending between 3 and 187 hours per month in their Ambassador role. The average median amount of time reported was 12.5 hours per month. When asked to consider their impact on others, Ambassadors reported positive perceived impacts. Ambassadors most often (76%) selected the statement "helped my peers become more aware of postsecondary options". The second most often (71%) selected statement was "made a positive impact on their peers postsecondary plans"; and lastly Ambassadors (66%) selected the statement "connected my peers with the types of support needed to pursue secondary education".

The CRT and the School Ambassador component of the CKG model appear promising and are components in need of continuing improvement. Sites are encouraged to set specific, measurable strategies in their action planning process to improve these two components in 2021-2022.

Stipends in Support of Improving School Site Capacity

CKG sites were also eligible for up to \$10,000.00 in stipend supports. Total stipend spending on project activities was approximately \$114, 229.15 for the 2020-2021 year for 13 CKG sites; see exhibit below. Each site was able to submit for stipend support up to \$10,000.00 for the year. Some sites also received additional funding that was not stipend specific to support these efforts. The range of spending for the year was from \$0.00 to \$10,000.00 per site. The mean average of funds per site was \$1,862.25 and the median average of funds per site was \$3,724.50.

The types of activity supported varied widely across sites. Eight sites reported spending on prizes for the students who completed the FAFSA application and for participating in various other college readiness events. Seven sites reported spending on ACT test preparation resources and five sites reported spending on school equipment such as projectors, microphones, school-branded media drops, and a portable PA system. Six sites reported spending on food, materials, guest speakers, and activities for college promotional events.

Given how the stipends are tracked and reported, it is difficult to assess specifically the influence of these stipends on local site goal areas. It is not clear what guidance sites are given in terms of “best practices” or effective strategies to support with stipends. After a full year of implementation, sites may be able to target these finances more specifically in relationship to overall CKG model goals.

CRTs identify and address gaps to improve postsecondary outcomes for students

Each CKG site developed an action plan that included a focus on ways to improve postsecondary outcomes for students. The CRT appears to be the main group of individuals with responsibility to working on this action plan. Approximately 43% of 42 respondents to the end-of-year survey indicated that yes, the CRT has met all of the action plan goals. This represented 11 out of 14 (79%) of all CKG sites reporting. However, an external assessment of the action plans found only one site to have agreement between the CRT member report of all goals accomplished and a report on all benchmarks being accomplished. This result is noted in order for CKG Coordinators and program staff to explore further how sites develop and understand their accomplishment of action plans.

According to results of the end-of-year survey with CRT members, the top three areas of focus for improving implementation are: (1) improving how the CRT creates new and innovative ways of engaging students and families in post-secondary efforts; (2) improving how the CRT develops school wide postsecondary goals and action steps that reflect equity; and

(3) improving how the CRT can increase collaboration among school stakeholders in regard to postsecondary planning priorities.

CRTs increase collaboration within schools to support postsecondary planning with students.

Survey data largely supported the program’s underlying assumption that CRTs would lead to more collaboration within schools. While not a majority held view, at the end of the school year 45% of CRT respondents (n=19) strongly agreed that the CRT has increased collaboration. This appears to be an area that CRTs can continue to focus on for improving implementation of the CKG model. Some members indicated that it would be helpful to find ways to get more teachers involved in promoting college and career readiness. In addition, better communicating the work of the CRT was viewed as important to increase collaboration within the school with departments and other groups.

Students receive services/supports through the CKG program

The primary types of services/supports offered to students are focused on: (1) increasing student access to standardized test preparation; (2) increasing the number of students completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); and (3) supporting students so that they can successfully apply to, matriculate at, and succeed in 2- and 4-year colleges. As noted earlier, the evaluation design does not include collecting any data directly from students about their experiences with CKG program services. Data related to CKG goals focusing on ACT prep and college application completion is collected as well as data on other direct services provided to students by AdviseAZ AmeriCorps members. Services and other types of support provided to students by Student Ambassadors are also documented. For services provided directly to students, 79% of these services were provided in person, 15% provided by videoconference and 6% by telephone call.

According to the senior class enrollment data provided from the CKG sites, there were 3,703 enrolled seniors. CKG reporting appears to indicate that at least 749 of enrolled seniors received some sort of direct service, or at least 20% of all eligible seniors. Activity by Ambassadors that could indirectly engage students across the CKG sites resulted in many more students receiving support. For example, Ambassadors who posted to social media resulted in over 17,988 views during the year.

With FAFSA support being the biggest area of focus, results indicate that by the end of the year, six of the fifteen (40%) CKG schools met or exceeded their FAFSA completion rate goal. Of note is that just three CKG sites performed below the actual state FAFSA completion rate for 2020-2021.

CRTs have the support needed within schools to initiate and sustain college access efforts

The majority (60%) of the CRT members surveyed at the end of the year believed that the CRT has strong support from school principals and/or vice principals. Over half, 52%, of these

respondents strongly agree that CRT members have the skills and knowledge required to lead school-wide college access initiatives. CRT members overwhelmingly expressed an interest in continuing to participate in CKG CRT. This quote summarizes many others: “This program is assisting us in increasing the capacity of our school to support college-going culture campus-wide.” CRT members identified areas of need for continued support that included: Recruiting people committed to the program and its goals, giving team members sufficient time in their “regular” work schedules to dedicate to CKG, having designated roles and responsibilities for members, having a team lead position, and considering having a large team. Other recommendations centered on how the team should function: planning before the start of school year, including the whole team in planning, having achievable goals, getting data about successful strategies used at other schools with similar demographics, and planning out meetings ahead of time and holding them regularly.

CKG Outcome Findings

CKG provides supports students need to pursue postsecondary options

Ambassador Role

Twenty-one students served in the role as Ambassador this past year representing all but one project site. These students appear to be benefitting in multiple ways for themselves and are able to directly and indirectly support their peers need to pursue postsecondary options. Of note is that 76% of the Ambassadors believed that they positively impacted their peers “becoming more aware of postsecondary options”. For themselves, 95% indicated the largest area of personal growth was more skills in the area of enhancing their abilities to reach out and connect with peers. The skill area they rated as growing in the least was improving their public speaking abilities (52%).

Also of note is that these Ambassadors had a wide range of important program improvement recommendations. A common theme is represented by this quote, “One thing I would change (and this is something as an ambassador I probably should have done more) is there should have been more awareness of my position as an ambassador so maybe the students would have reached out more and would have interacted more than they did”. At the end of the year, the majority (81%) of the Ambassadors reported some changes they felt needed to be done to improve the program.

Progress on Action Plans

An important outcome finding is that it appears that across all CKG sites, just 16 of the 48 (33%) goals set in site action plans were assessed as accomplished. Fourteen of the 15 sites set a goal to increase the FAFSA completion rate and 9 sites set a goal to increase student awareness of post-secondary opportunities. Five sites set a goal to increase their average composite ACT score. Four sites set a goal to increase the percentage of students applying to postsecondary programs. Three sites set goals to increase total scholarship awards, increase post-secondary enrollment,

and increase communication to institution staff about college and career readiness. Across all sites, 26 of the 55 (47%) of the benchmarks were assessed as met and 126 of the 214 (72%) strategies were assessed as fully completed.

How sites describe progress on action plans varied and there was disagreement when comparing CRT member perceptions of progress on action planning and the review of action plan documents submitted. These discrepancies made it difficult to assess progress across and within each project site.

The Work of the CRT

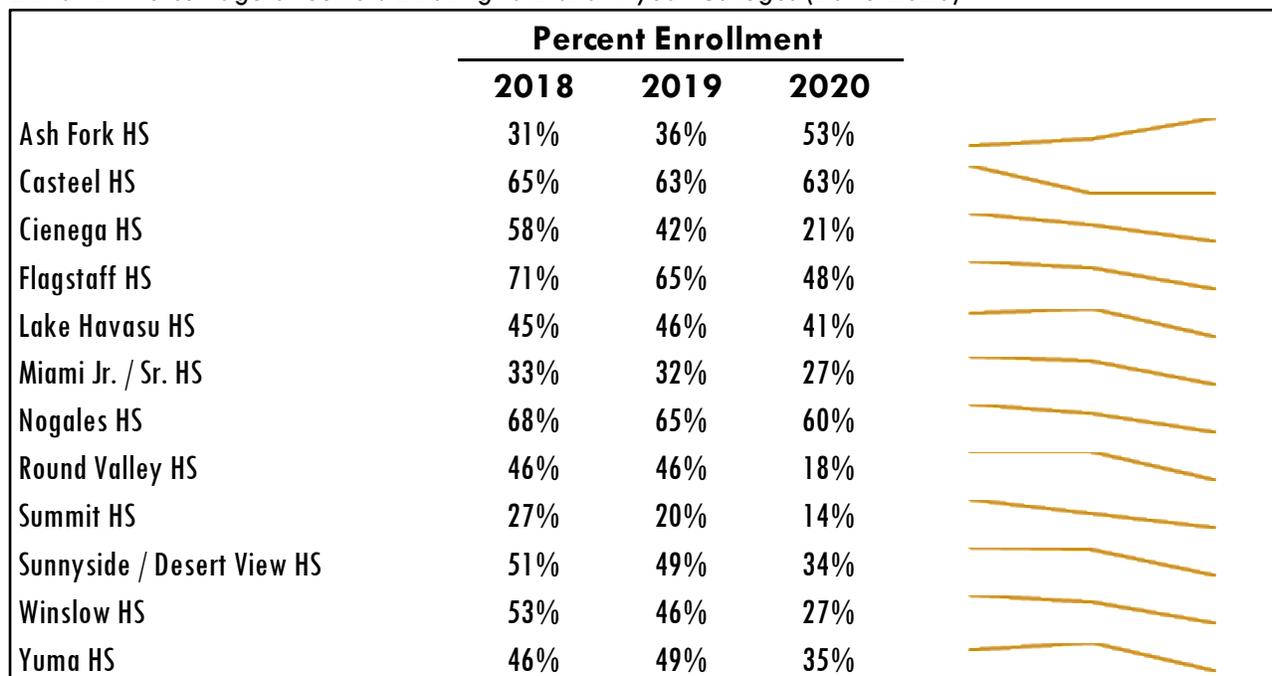
At the end-of-year survey period, 69% of CRT member respondents reported that the CRT was dedicated to improving postsecondary options for students. From survey self-reports, many CRT members expressed appreciation for the CKG program. It does appear that overall, the majority of CRT members share the perception that the CKG program is supporting students' pursuit of postsecondary goals. This quote is indicative of sentiments shared by many CRT members: "Thank you! I am not sure that we would have been able to accomplish as much as we did without our monthly CRT meetings. We are driven to build a culture of college and career readiness, but we had a lot of interruption this past year. The student Ambassadors were incredible, and we are so grateful that their efforts earned them a scholarship which helps them move forward toward their own post-secondary success".

Does CKG contributed to increased rates of enrollment at 2- and 4-year colleges?

Results at this time are based on just the first year of implementation at the school sites in 2020 compared to rates in 2018 and 2019. It is important to take into consideration that first year implementation occurred most comprehensively starting in the Fall of 2020. This would therefore limit the potential influence the CKG intervention may have had at each site. The findings indicate that overall, for most sites with data available, the percentage of seniors enrolling to 2 and 4-year colleges in 2020 were down from the two previous years as illustrated in Exhibit B below.

The statistical technique of loglinear analysis was used to detect if there was a difference in proportions of enrollments comparing 2020 to 2018 and 2019 combined. While percent enrollment changed each year for each site, when analyzing all the CKG sites with data available, the odds of a senior not enrolling to college is 79% higher in 2020 than in 2018 and 2019 combined (OR 1.79; 95% CI 1.64 to 1.95). It may be that the horrendous effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities starting in 2020 has contributed significantly to this downturn in enrollments. This type of analysis can continue each year to further explore the influence of CKG on enrollment rates.

Exhibit B. Percentage of Seniors Enrolling to 2 and 4-year Colleges (2018-2020)



Recommendations to Improve Implementation

- The CRT strategy appears to be successful as a way to engage staff and others in supporting the CKG action plan at each site. To improve CRT functioning, teams may need support in building better approaches to consensus-based decision-making that engages all team members in more meaningful ways. Maintaining focused engagement for all team members is vital to effective team performance.
- It is difficult to track progress on site action plans with the current reporting format. School sites could be asked to set specific targets for each goal area and then self-assess on progress on each goal at year end. For example, they could rate their own progress as: Poor Progress -Did Not Meet Goal / Expected Progress – Goal Met / Exceptional Progress – Achieved More than Established Goal. In particular, it may be beneficial to carefully document the ways in which sites are achieving beyond their expectations and share those lessons learned across the initiative.
- The Ambassador role in support of overall CKG aims appears to have been a very successful component of the CKG model. It is recommended that Ambassadors are engaged as much as possible to provide ongoing feedback to CKG leadership and local site staff on ways to improve project implementation.
- Surveys with CRT members and others is the primary way information is collected about implementation. It is recommended that for both 2021-2022 mid-year and end-of-year survey data collection that respondents are matched at each time point of data collection. This will involve more coordination for data collection on the part of CKG

staff to sites. Response rates also need to be higher at each time point with all respondents. In addition, each survey questionnaire should be reviewed so that results are informing CKG program staff in ways that are relevant as the project moves into a second year of full implementation.

Recommendations on Improving Outcomes

Given that this was the first full year of implementation of the CKG model, reporting on outcomes is limited. There is evidence from survey results that overall, the majority of those involved with the CKG model across the sites believe that the work does have an impact on supporting students to prepare for and succeed in postsecondary pursuits. As mentioned above, the action planning process and documentation of results needs to be revised to allow sites to better identify how strategies are aligned with overall CKG goals and to more reliably assess progress. There are no performance standards for sites to meet so their own assessment of progress is important to document. Enrollment rates have dropped overall in 2020 which is an expected finding given the external impact of COVID-19 on college enrollments state-wide. This year demonstrated that the overall aim to improve college enrollment rates over time can be measured by site to assess CKG model impact. It is important to have complete NSC enrollment data from every site. In addition, it is even more critical to have accurate and complete data on the demographics of all students for any future outcome analyses. This is vital in terms of issues of equity and to explore how the implementation of the CKG model at sites may or may not be supporting all students to prepare for and pursue post-secondary options.