The Pasadena Community Foundation
PCF Scholars Program

Year One Evaluation Final Summary Report

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Introduction

In early 2018, the Pasadena Community Foundation launched a study to explore how the foundation could best support Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD) high school graduates who enrolled in Pasadena City College. The findings from this research informed the design of an innovative, evidence-based approach to support students at risk of academic failure in meeting their educational goals. The PCF Scholars Program was launched in the summer of 2019 with a cohort of eight students. At the end of the fall 2019 semester, one student moved.

This report provides a summary of student and program partner reactions to the first year of this program. Findings indicate that while the program is still in a formative stage, there is evidence that it is having an impact on the students. Lessons learned are included in this report as well as recommendations for future program improvements.

Background

Developing Effective Supports for PUSD students entering PCC

Community college is a crucial component of our nation's education system, offering students an inexpensive way to achieve higher levels of education and ultimately higher earnings. Average earnings are 32 percent higher and unemployment rates are 39 percent lower for those with an associate’s degree compared to those with only a high school degree. College enrollment rates in general have risen, but dropout rates are very high at community colleges, especially among low-income students. Data from the U.S. Department of Education indicate that six years after first enrolling, nearly 50 percent of community college students have dropped out. Furthermore, only 36 percent of Hispanic students and 28 percent of black students who enroll at a community college go on to earn a degree, whether at that school or any other, within six years.

For PUSD students enrolled in PCC, this same discouraging trend exists. On average, over 1,400 students graduate from Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD) high school each year. Of those, approximately one third attend Pasadena City College (PCC). Less than one third of those students transfer or graduate in under four years. In 2019, the Pasadena Community Foundation (PCF) launched the PCF Scholars Program with the objective of increasing the completion rates of PUSD graduates who attend PCC.

Program Description

The PCF Scholar Program provides an innovative approach to the traditional scholarship model. The program combines need-based financial assistance, wraparound, ongoing academic and social support from counselors, and summer
orientation to help PUSD students achieve their college education goals. It is also
designed to strengthen community partnerships and build upon existing programs
offered by College Access Plan (CAP) and the PCC Pathways Program. The PCC
Foundation administers the financial awards including the bookstore voucher, stipends
awarded after census date and flexible spending money.

In an effort to incorporate evaluation into the planning, monitoring and eventual
understanding of long term impact, program partners discussed realistic short and long
term goals for the program. The following outcomes were defined:

Student Outcomes:

- Each PCF scholar forms a meaningful relationship with an informed adult
- Enhanced financial literacy - better understanding of money and financial
  planning/greater confidence in addressing financial challenges
- Increased confidence in accessing supports at PCC and in the community
- Awareness of the holistic support offered by Pathways and CAP
- Increased clarity about educational and career goals
- Increased belief in future success and inspiration to vigorously pursue goals
- 100 % retention in Pathways
- 100 % graduate with an AA degree in four years or transfer to a four-year college

Community and Partner Outcomes:

- Increased collaboration and communication between CAP and Pathways
- Increased community awareness of the role PCF has in supporting PUSD
  graduates
- Provide a model for a research-based, innovative and responsive scholarship
  program
- Increased incentives for PUSD students to enroll in CAP, Pathways and PCC

Methods

In-Depth Interviews

Interviews were conducted with seven students and four key program partners using an
interview protocol. Interviews lasted around 20-40 minutes and responses were entered
into an online database. All responses were coded for common themes.

Analysis of Student Data

College Access Plan, Pathways and PCC Foundation staff provided end of the year
student outcome data as a part of the PCF annual grant report requirements.
Descriptive data analysis was used to illustrate the student academic performance and
course completion for year one.
Results

Student Reactions

When asked to describe their experience as a PCF Scholar, all seven students had positive reactions. When asked specifically which components of The PCF Scholars Program helped them most directly, students mentioned the bookstore voucher, priority registration, summer Jam and access to counselors from CAP or Pathways.

**Figure 1. Students description of the Most Successful components of the PCF Scholars Program**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bookstore voucher</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority registration</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer Orientation - Jam</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAP support: communication with Betty</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathways counselors/ Meetings with Tanith</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathways Center - access to computers, internet &amp; tutors</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible financial support</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer Orientation - I Heart College</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following quotes are examples of what students most appreciated:

**Access to a range of supports**

“I really benefitted from being in PCF Scholar. I would often go to the Pathways center for help. I went to Tanith for guidance on what course I should take. She was helpful and showed me how to transfer to dental hygiene. It is good to have Betty from CAP check in on me. If I ever ask her a question, she always gets back to me right away. She answers my questions.”

“PCF Program has provided so many opportunities for students. It is very beneficial and helps students in the most critical ways. These check-ins and having a counselor at Pathways is much more valuable than just financial support. I feel like PCF is unique because it offers so much more than a typical
scholarship. I get the feeling the people who designed this program really care about us as people and as students.”

“When I first started Pathways, I did not have internet and computer...I would go to their office to use their computer. Then once we had to move to online classes, PCF Scholars covered the expenses of a new computer. This made a big difference.”

“I feel like it did make a difference because I have more support. I would say having Betty is helpful. I talk to her about options for classes. She helped me out with renewals Dream Act–helping me [with] renewing. That was helpful to have Pathways Summer Jam and start to feel comfortable on campus. I made friends and learned where things are on campus.”

“I would say PCF Scholars Program is a great thing because you have people who text you and offer to help.”

Financial supports: Bookstore voucher and flexible emergency money

“I think having the book store money is the best part of this program. Books can be very expensive. Book store credit was the best.”

“Books are expensive [and] knowing that you are covered is great. Also have emergency money helped pay for my Wi-Fi at home. The hot spot we had did not allow me to complete my work and when we had to start doing work at home, not having internet made it impossible. PCF Scholars paid for my internet service and made my online learning possible.”

In one notable interview, a student attributed his persistence in school directly to the PCF Scholars Program:

“I think it has been very helpful. I don’t know how to thank PCF enough. I know I would not have been able to stay in school without the support of the PCF Scholars Program. There are so many ways this program has helped me, paid for my internet, my computer, helped me buy food and cover my rent. Without this help, I would not have been able to pass. The biggest help was with the money. Because I really needed help.”

Student Recommendations

When asked to describe some of the limitations to The PCF Scholars Program, the most common themes to emerge related to 1) lack of clarity about accessing additional financial supports, 2) desire for more targeted in-person communication and 3) access to additional academic support.

More in-depth communication from counselors
“I would say that texts from Betty are fine, but I like the calls more. Phone calls are best—it’s easier to talk through the things that you are going through; phone call is more personal and makes it easier to get into details. Texting is OK, but the phone is better.

Not all the students were aware of all the financial benefits available to them. The PCC Foundation deposited their award stipend after fall census date and students could not differentiate this from general financial aid. Across both students and program partners, there was a common request for increased clarity about access to financial supports.

“The part that was hard was not knowing how to get access to emergency money. I needed to buy a kit for the dental hygiene program and it was really expensive. I also needed help with bills, but when I asked the Pathways counselor, she never replied.”

Midyear interviews revealed a common theme of students learning and taking advantage of many academic supports available on PCC campus, including the Math Success Center and the Writing Support Center. However, when classes went online, end of the year interviews revealed that many students felt disconnected from these supports. When asked how PCF can support them in the future, students requested additional academic support in the form of tutoring.

“Right now, I am OK, but next semester I am going to take some of my harder nursing classes. I think it would be helpful to have academic tutoring.”

“I need academic support with math. One-on-one tutoring.”

The theme of need for additional targeted academic support was repeated when students were asked what supports they feel they need to continue and persist at PCC. The most common response focused on introducing online tutoring as an additional academic support. If this came up in the interview, all students were reminded of the free tutoring available through PCC. However, this resource was not used effectively by students, for unclear reasons.

Related to the need for additional academic supports, students were asked to describe their transition to college life and how prepared they felt for college-level course work. All PCF Scholars described a feeling of being unprepared for the pace and academic challenge of their classes at PCC. The following quotes illustrate the students’ perceptions regarding lack of academic preparation.

“Personally, in my high school, it was really small. In my high school, I did not feel I was prepared for college. I really went in feeling blind. I did not know what to expect. In college, it is very time-consuming. It is very fast paced. I was not used to it. In high school, we had lots of time.”
“I feel like, in college, the teachers put more heart into teaching. College is completely different from high school. The pace is much faster and advanced. They don't hold your hand and it makes me feel challenged.”

“My high school did not prepare me for college-level math. I took College Algebra during my senior year. I ended up dropping the class first semester. I did ok in the other classes—I got a B in my English and an A in my College 1. I have had a shift in maturity even since first semester. I just gave up when math got hard. Now, I am doing better and I am putting more into it.”

Partner Reactions

When asked to describe their reactions to the pilot year of the PCF Scholars Program, responses varied. Most partners described both an overall successful launch of the first semester, with some notable lack of clarity in the beginning and new obstacles presented by the pandemic and campus closure in March. The two main frustrations with the PCF Scholars Program included the barriers to communication between Tanith and Betty and lack of clarity on how to process flexible spending money. The FERPA law did not allow Tanith to openly share student academic records. Partners felt the process and guidelines for use of flexible funding was confusing. Overall, the partners maintained positive impression of the program and felt it has been an effective partnership.

Partner reactions are illustrated in the following quotes:

“I really think that the idea of CAP and Pathways working is good. That has been an incredible experience to put these two organizations together. Nothing special about having money and financial aid and counselors, it is the relationship we develop with students that is the most valuable.”

“I love the idea of the program and that so many of the students who attend Pasadena City College are from out of the district. Having an opportunity to support Pasadena Unified School District students, the ones who come from in-district is significant. It is really important that this program exists at Pasadena City College.”

When asked to describe what they perceive to be the main benefit of the PCF Scholars Program, partner responses varied. Some described the importance of first generation college students making connections with adults who are there to support them. This theme emerged from both student and partner interviews. Many PUSD graduates arrive at college less academically prepared and if they are the first in their family to go to college, they must navigate the transition into college with little or no useful support from their parents. As described by Pathways staff:

“I think, regardless, the students have been able to make a connection with an adult, with a coach, myself, Tito. They have been able to make a connection with
someone. It may not seem like the students are making huge gains in academics, but I can see that this program is having a very positive influence. PCF Scholars keep them motivated and helping them have a feeling of persistence. That mindset and belief they can succeed is essential. It is almost the most important foundation for long term success.”

Other comments related the value of having new opportunities to collaborate with PUSD serving organizations like CAP.

“From what I have seen, there is new communication with outside partners, like PCF and with CAP.”

Despite the proclaimed value of connections from both students and staff, both CAP and Pathways counselors described mixed levels of connection with students.

“I have not heard equally [from] the students and have heard from some more than others. I know about half of them better than the other. Depending on their style and schedule, I don’t have a fully developed connection with all of them. I think they would like more connection. Even more so as learning goes online— the students need more in-depth personal connections.

“The high school CAP functions as a drop-in program. They come in when they want to work on something. The approach in the college level is similar, student led. Our curriculum has the summer transition program, first phone calls— specific communications for the students. It really depends on the student.”

Student Academic Outcomes

The average GPA across all six students who completed the semester was 2.95 and the average number of units completed spring semester was 9 courses. Because PCF Scholars were all disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus, this data is an improvement from first semester. As illustrated in the figures below, the average GPA across the seven PCF Scholars was 2.2 and the average number of fall units completed was 7.

\[\text{One student did not complete her course when instruction moved online.}\]
A more detailed look at individual student performance illustrates the wide range of experiences and academic outcomes across PCF Scholars.
It is positive to note than GPA’s increased from Fall to Spring semester for most students. While only three of the seven students completed the minimum required units to maintain enrolment as a PCF Scholar (15 units per year), two are enrolled in summer classes and will meet the minimum requirement. Because of the disruptions caused by the pandemic, all students will be grandfathered in and offered continued support as a PCF Scholar in 2020. However, it is clear specific students will need additional support.

The Pasadena City College Foundation shared how much money was spent in total and across students. Besides the $500 bookstore voucher and $500 stipend, flexible/emergency spending varied widely. Three students accessed flexible/emergency funds to purchase computers and internet, two used flexible/emergency funds to pay for supplemented tutoring and one had extensive financial needs for rent, utilities and to cover basic food supplies. The range in spending of flexible funds was approximately $3,700 to cover basic living expenses. for the highest need student and $160 to cover tutoring for the lowest need student. The use of these funds clearly made a significant impact. In one case, the access to flexible spending allowed for a student to stay connected and housed and in the other case, allowed for a student to pass a gatekeeper math class. These results show that even relatively moderate investments in low-income students’ education can have modest short impacts on their academic outcomes.

**Partner Recommendations**

While all partners felt the first year was intended to be a pilot and greatly illustrated the initial successes, they also provided suggestions for improvement. Partners recommended clarifying specific responsibilities and a schedule for the program’s
activities. They all expressed interest in increasing opportunities to share information about students with more structured opportunities for collaboration.

Some additional suggestions for improvements to the program include having a GPA requirement and adding additional college readiness lenses to the student selection process.

“I would like to see the new class of PCF Scholars reflect this class, but find students who are college-English ready. In courses, you need at least a certain level of English comprehension.”

“I think GPA can be a useful measure of students’ readiness. Those with a 3.0 to 4.0 from high school are more prepared for college. If a student has below a 2.5, it is going to be harder for PCF Scholars program to help them. I would look at their actual grades, I would look to see if they need. This is the first year the students came and did not take a placement test.”

**Note:** Unique challenges presented by COVID-19.

The students who were selected to participate in the PCF Scholars Program face significant challenges, such as having a low income, parents who were out of work, and unstable housing. The realities of COVID-19 have added to their burden. The transition to online learning created significant new challenges for some PCF Scholars who did not have access to technology. Three students did not have internet connection at home, and two students did not own a computer. Fortunately, the built-in program feature of flexible emergency funds, allowed for an immediate response and all students could continue their education. One student felt the access may have come too late, as she had already fallen behind. In addition, when she did start up, she found the online format too difficult and she dropped her classes for the remainder of the semester.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

These findings are intended to help guide the discussion related to continued program improvement and support. PCF Scholars credit the program with changing their comfort level with college and persistence in their education. PCF Scholars described feeling supported by a caring adult and learning about opportunities and supports on campus. However, most students also said they felt the financial supports were not as easily accessible in some cases, inadequately prepared for the rigors of college course work. Below, we will provide recommendations tailored to this information learned from the report.

**Program Strengths**

Students and partners described many benefits of the PCF Scholars Program.
Access to credit in the book store to cover high cost of books.

Increased access to school supports, such as priority registration and campus writing and math center.

Flexible financial supports and access to emergency money, that enabled the most vulnerable students to stay in school and engage with online learning.

New opportunities to collaborate between CAP, Pathways, PCF and the PCC Foundation.

Recommendations

The feedback received from students and partners was generally positive. In order to continue improving the program, consider the following recommendations:

Student Selection/Recruitment

- Recommendation: Revise selection guidelines to ensure students have stable housing and are prepared for the rigor of college-level course work. College readiness and housing are important assumptions in the success of this program.
  - Action: Revise application to include a field for student high school GPA and a description of housing.
  - Action: Revise PCF Scholars Program scoring rubric to include weighted scores related students' housing and high school academic performances (course completion and/or GPA).

Program Requirements

- Recommendation: Clarify student requirements to maintain enrollment in the PCF Scholars Program.
  - Action: Grandfather in year one students. Communicate requirements with new recruits, change the contract and ongoing messaging to ensure requirements are clear and understood.
  - Action: Consider adding a probation for students who do not meet requirements.

Access to Funds

- Recommendation: Clarify use of and access to flexible spending and emergency money.
  - Action: Instruct PCF Scholars to include subject line “PCF Scholars Emergency Funds” in subject lines when emailing Kris.
  - Action: Clarify with PCC Foundation how to add communication to ensure students know funds are from the PCF Scholars Program.
- Recommendation: Clarify that funding can be used for winter and summer classes.
  - Action: Meet with Pathways to devise a plan to ensure PCF Scholars are aware and encouraged to enroll in winter and summer.
  - Action: Include summer and winter enrollment data in PCF grant reporting.
Program Partners

PCC Pathways
- Recommendation: Look for opportunities to expand academic tutoring. There is no easy way to address students who may not be prepared for college level course work. While Pathways provides support to help very poorly prepared students succeed, online options may be needed to supplement this offering.
  - Action: Assess feasibility of offering Wyzant tutor support in specific cases. If feasible, develop criteria for accessing specialized private online tutor. As needed, set up direct payment of private tutor services through PCC Foundation.

College Access Plan
- Recommendation: Consider ways to build in more proactive vs. reactive support. Evidence from student interviews and student academic performance shows that there may be a need for stronger, early interventions to help students with courses, before they fall behind or drop out of courses.
  - Action: Review research on the most effective “dose” and format for counseling and wraparound support. PCF identify effective models used by other foundations with scholarship support. Use this information to guide a discussion with CAP about proactive vs reactive support.

- Recommendation: Provide more specific PCC related topics in I Heart College, such as early access to Canvas and importance of monitoring course drop deadlines.
  - Action: Share with Mo feedback from students about summer orientation and gaps in knowledge. Discuss the possibility of including these topics in future I Heart College planning or follow up communication with Mo and CAP.

PCC Pathways and College Access Plan
- Recommendation: Consider and experiment with new ways to engage students in communication beyond text check ins and periodic virtual meetings to deepen the connection between counselors and students. Although PCF Scholars are generally satisfied with the relationships they have developed with either CAP or Pathways counselors, they still feel they need more communication.
  - Action: Examine if drop model is sufficiently proactive for PCF Scholars “wraparound” surround. Research further effective wraparound communication.
- Recommendation: Monitor grades more carefully to identify students who are struggling and offer targeted tutoring support.
  - Action: Have students sign FERPA waiver, allowing Tanith to communicate with Betty.
  - Action: Develop googledoc to identify students in need of support.
- Recommendation: Continue to encourage regular meetings with CAP and Pathways counselors.
o Action: Ask Betty and Tanith to develop target dates and a plan for regular communication.

**Pasadena Community Foundation**
- Recommendation: Increase clarity around partners' roles so they understand not only their individual roles but the essential timing for their support. For example, if a student has a request for emergency funds, establish clear guidelines around the turnaround time and when the students can expect to have their request fulfilled.
  - Action: Set realistic response times and include these timelines in revised grant agreements.

**Reporting**
- Recommendation: Continue to revise and fine tune the PCF grant reporting module to include additional outcomes for CAP related to student wraparound support
  - Action: Revise PCF grant report to include more specific measures of student engagement and outcomes.
- Recommendation: Develop a shared, confidential data base to collect, share and collaborate over student insights and data.
  - Action: PCF develop shared googledoc allowing for live update of student information.

Overall, these findings indicate that the first year of the PCF Scholars Program has been a success. While still in the formative stage, this program offers promise. At the heart of the PCF Scholarship Program is a team of partners wanting to provide students with the support they need to stay enrolled and persist in their education. As the program continues to grow and adapt, ongoing program evaluation will help ensure the program is successful.