Educational Leadership and Comprehensive Reform for Improving Equity and Access for All

Olcay Yavuz, *Southern Connecticut State University*

Abstract Disparities in college access for underrepresented urban students are one of the most urgent educational problems of America's education system. In response to growing national concern, this longitudinal study investigated how school leaders worked collaboratively with key stakeholders to implement research-supported student services in order to improve college access for underrepresented urban students. The quantitative investigation showed that when educational leaders and key stakeholders worked collaboratively to deliver comprehensive student services, urban students in a high-poverty school district experienced measurable benefits in terms of their college enrolment. This study may be of particular value to policymakers, school leaders, and educators concerned with the low college access rates of students in urban schools, as well as to those who are seeking to understand what works better to prepare urban students for post-secondary education.

Keywords Principal and counselor partnership, School reform, College access of urban students

Introduction

America has often been called "the land of opportunity." In terms of the college readiness and access of underrepresented urban students, however, America has been a land of inequality. Research findings and national statistics indicate that a lack of college readiness and success among underrepresented urban students is one of the most prominent social justice issues and urgent problems of America's education system (NCES, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The efforts of school leaders to utilize effective educational policies and fiscal and human resources to improve the college readiness of underprivileged urban students can be considered the Civil Rights movement of the twenty-first century (ASCA, 2012; Dahir and Stone, 2012).

The lack of college access for urban students in high poverty school districts has led the United States Department of Education to focus on leadership, policy, and school reforms that ensure every student graduating from U.S. high schools is ready for college and a career. Since the implementation of the new federal college readiness and accountability standards, national attention has been focused on helping all students get ready for college and/or preparing for a career. In response to growing national concern, this study investigates how school leaders can work collaboratively with key stakeholders to improve every urban student's outcomes through implementing research supported student services.

The previous research studies support the positive impact of effective leadership and comprehensive school counseling programs on urban students' achievement and college readiness (Carrell & Hoekstra, 2014; Wilkerson, Pérusse, & Hughes, 2013; Lapan, Gysbers, Stanley, & Pierce, 2012; Lapan, Whitcomb, & Aleman, 2012). Yet within many urban school settings, there is a disconnect between these findings and school leaders' knowledge of comprehensive school counseling programs (College Board, 2010). Even though research emphasizes building a working counselor and administrator relationship to impact student achievement, a significant amount of school leaders lack a systematic partnership with school counselors (Dahir & Stone, 2012). Recent literature highlights misconceptions about the role of school counselors, particularly on the part of school administrators (ASCA, 2012; Dahir, Burnham, Stone, & Cobb, 2010). Therefore, this study encourages school leaders to consider counselors as partners and collaborators in improving urban student success rates through more effective school counseling services.

Consistent with the purpose of the study, the investigation has been guided by two major research questions: (1) How does participation in the comprehensive College Readiness Access and Success Program (CRASP) affect underrepresented urban students' college access? and (2) How does each CRASP intervention affect underrepresented urban students' college enrolment? In light of these research questions, this study provides educational leaders and key stakeholders with effective strategies to design and implement comprehensive academic and counseling services. Particularly, this study focuses on what works better to prepare urban public school students for post-secondary education.

Aligned with the purpose of the study, the literature review was designed to contribute to the existing literature on effective leadership and counseling services for improving underrepresented urban students' outcomes in two ways. Since this study

measured the impact of the College Readiness Access and Success Program (CRASP), the first part of literature review introduces the roles of school leaders in designing and leading CRASP, which aims to provide systematic support for all urban students to become college and career ready. Second, the researcher discussed the various aspects of the program and related literature on the roles of twenty-first century school leaders in promoting equity and access for all. Therefore, the findings may be of value to policymakers, school principals, educators, and other key stakeholders concerned with low college access rates of underrepresented urban students.

Leading the college readiness access and success program (CRASP)

Educational leaders, researchers, and policymakers have made a significant effort to develop various intervention and prevention programs to improve underprivileged urban students' skills, knowledge, and aspirations so they become college and career ready (Fenske, Geranios, Keller, & Moore, 1997; Perna & Titus, 2005). Particularly, Leuwicke & Walker (2009) indicate that effective principal-counselor relationships can lead to success for all students. However, there are still misconceptions about the role of school leaders in implementing comprehensive school counseling services because the previous studies did not provide educators with detailed examples about those roles.

For the most part, previous studies emphasized measuring the impacts of the programs on students' outcomes, but they did not clarify what school leaders can do to implement comprehensive counseling programs. The unclear roles of school leaders and a lack of information about specific program implementations make it difficult to generalize the potential effectiveness of these programs for educators (ASCA, 2012). In order to fill that gap in the literature, in this study, the researcher describes the specific roles of the school leaders in developing, delivering and evaluating the comprehensive school counseling program that is CRASP.

CRASP was designed by a group of school leaders, counselors, and teachers to improve the college and career readiness of every urban student in a high poverty public school. During the design and implementation of CRASP, the school leaders used the framework of the comprehensive school counseling program. The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012) also provided the school leaders with the insights and strategies necessary to utilize their resources to design and lead effective interventions to help underprivileged urban students prepare for college. This part of the literature review also focuses on the role of school leaders in implementing four components of CRASP that offer equity-based and research-supported interventions to improve outcomes for high poverty urban students. These four major components of CRASP implementation and evaluation are program foundation, management, delivery, and accountability.

Leadership for building the CRASP foundation

The first responsibility of school leaders in terms of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program is to build a solid program foundation that includes program mission, vision, goals, needs assessments, and student standards (ASCA, 2012). Before implementing CRASP, Rossi, Lipsey, and Freedman (2004) recommend that

the school leadership team conduct comprehensive needs assessments to identify their students' needs and prioritize the interventions required to design systematic academic and counseling services. In this case, in the beginning of the school year, the school leaders consulted with different stakeholders, including teachers, counselors, parents, and students, to identify current program strengths and areas where improvement is needed. The leadership team also received systematic feedback not only from their students and teachers, but also from parents and community members, to develop and plan necessary interventions and preventions. In order to help all of their urban students, the leadership team also periodically reviewed available data and modified the goals and plan accordingly. Moreover, during the school-wide meetings and trainings, the message "all students have the potential to get into college and graduate from college if the proper guidance, support, and access to resources are provided," was constantly given by the school leaders.

Based on the needs assessment results and the school's mission, the leadership team worked collaboratively with key stakeholders to establish the program goals. Particularly, school leaders emphasized that the main goal of CRASP is to provide all underrepresented urban students with ongoing academic support, assistance with financial aid issues, and individualized college and career counseling to help them improve their college access and success. During the faculty meetings, the school leadership team systematically referenced the school's guiding principle that all students have self-worth and an innate potential to succeed in school and throughout their lives. The leadership team also made it clear that it is the school's responsibility to treat all students with dignity and encourage them to discover their own personal interests and academic strengths (ASCA, 2012). Throughout the school year, the school leaders communicated CRASP's vision, which focused on preparing self-directed, productive, college and career-ready students who have high expectations for their education, career, and life.

As recommended by ASCA (2012), the school leaders also worked on faculty capacity building to ensure all faculty and staff members were equipped to meet the rigorous demands of students. When faced with any ethical dilemma, school leaders, counselors, and teachers were encouraged to utilize ethical standards or an ethical decision-making model such as Solutions to Ethical Problems in Schools (STEPS) (Stone, 2010). In order to build program foundation, the school leadership team used ASCA National Model resources and leadership standards to apply the principles of ethical behavior necessary to maintain the highest standard of integrity, leadership, and professionalism (ASCA, 2012).

Leadership for designing and conducting program delivery

School leaders have a very significant role in designing and delivering academic and counseling services: they inspire and motivate teachers and counselors as well as subsidize and approve proposed student services (Dahir & Stone, 2012). During CRASP implementation, school leaders worked with school counselors to provide systematic services to improve every student's academic, social-emotional, and college and career development. In addition to students, as a part of capacity building

and skill development, the leadership team offered ongoing trainings and workshops to parents and all faculty and staff.

Based on the students' needs and in collaboration with different stakeholders, school leaders developed a comprehensive delivery system which included: (1) individual student learning plans, (2) a college dual enrolment program, (3) after school tutoring, (4) peer tutoring, (5) comprehensive SAT preparation program, (6) SAT elective courses (credit), (7) Accuplacer test preparation, (8) honor level courses, (9) individual counseling sessions, (10) classroom presentations, (11) school-wide college fairs and college trips, (12) parent, teacher, and counselor meetings, (13) a student recognition and rewards program, (14) a school-wide career day, (15) group counseling sessions, (16) one on one FAFSA application support, (17) home visits, (18) college and SAT fee waivers, and (19) instant decision days.

In reference to the ASCA National Model (2012), the delivery system is the main part of CRASP that offers individual student planning, a school counseling core curriculum, and responsive services. School leaders worked with the counseling department to develop a K-12 counseling curriculum that is comprehensive in scope, preventive in nature, and developmental in design. Throughout the school year, the school principal tasked the counselors with organizing developmental workshops and structured guidance lessons to provide all students with the knowledge and skills required for their college and career readiness. These workshops and guidance lessons were modified based on the students' needs and categorized into four major domains: character education and personal wellness, academic success, career development and college readiness.

The school leadership team worked diligently to implement and monitor all these nineteen programs. For each student service a program implementation timeline and policy guideline were prepared. The leadership team carefully identified the program leaders and primary stakeholders to clearly set up the standard operating procedures and documentation process. Since the cost and benefit of an educational program is one of the most important considerations in deciding whether to expand, continue, or terminate it (Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, 2004), during CRASP implementation, the school leaders created an itemized budget for each program-related expense. If costs are too high and irrational, the reward for making the change might be seen as inadequate (Fullan, 2007). The budget files and reports were also helpful in educating leaders and key stakeholders about the cost of implementation and its expected long-term and short-term outcomes.

Educational leadership in CRASP management

In order to effectively lead these comprehensive student services, school leaders acted as effective managers of resources and programs. While managing human and financial capital, school leaders were also required to understand the big picture of organizational processes and to value collaborative outcomes (Young & Miller-Kneale, 2013). In order to effectively manage and monitor academic curriculum and student services, school leaders incorporated the following items: annual counselor agreements, program assessment tools, annual and monthly calendars, action plans, and computer, technology, and advisory counseling meetings.

A particularly important part of CRASP management was the school leaders' establishment of an advisory council that provided a forum for open dialogue among all stakeholders (Dahir & Stone, 2012). This was established under the guidance of the ASCA National Model in order to review and monitor the counseling program activities and make recommendations to improve the quality of the counseling services. The advisory council represented all key stakeholder groups, which included: (a) a student representative from middle and high schools, (b) parents, (c) teachers, (d) school counselors, (e) a student assistant counselor, (f) administrators, and (g) community members. Overall, the advisory council focused on initiating, implementing, and sustaining a comprehensive school counseling program to improve students' personal, social, and academic development, as well as college and career readiness.

Educational leadership in CRASP accountability

With the advent of the new accountability standards in teaching, learning, and leadership, school leaders are increasingly challenged to provide evidence of program accomplishment (Dahir & Stone, 2012). In other words, school leaders are expected to demonstrate the effectiveness of the student services in measurable terms. To that end, in this study, school leaders used measurable units and various assessment techniques and strategies to evaluate the program and hold it accountable. For instance, the school leadership team asked the school counseling department to share weekly meeting minutes and prepare monthly result reports, which included comprehensive program impacts on student outcomes, what worked well, and what needed to be modified to improve the effectiveness of each program.

Second, to ensure that the counseling program was comprehensive in design and delivered in a systematic fashion for all students, school leaders worked with each counselor to establish personalized professional goals. As recommended by the ASCA National Model (2012), school leaders utilized the adapted version of ASCA's program audit template to evaluate and improve counselors' performance and program impacts. Overall, this study can be also considered to be the product of school leaders' focus on accountability. In the methods and results sections, details will be provided about the specific CRASP impacts.

The roles of twenty-first century educational leaders in promoting equity and access for all

A significant amount of previous research has emphasized the importance of high school experiences to improving underrepresented urban students' college readiness and success (College Board, 2010). They have revealed that if underrepresented urban students receive proper support and guidance during their high school years, then they are more likely to get into college (Adelman, 2006). Since school leaders have direct authority and the power to develop and monitor academic and counseling services, they play a crucial role in preparing every student for college and their future career (Lee & Eadens, 2014). Particularly, the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA, 2012) National Model and the College Board (2010) provide a valuable road map and framework for school leaders looking to initiate, implement, and lead comprehensive student services to help every student's school success and college readiness.

Moreover, as recommended by ASCA National Model (2012) and College Board (2010), to provide equity and college access for all urban students, this study conceptualized the roles of twenty-first century educational leaders under four major categories. These four major roles are (1) improving urban students' academic preparedness, (2) enhancing urban students' personal and social development, (3) preparing financially ready and responsible urban students, and (4) easing urban students' college admission and transition processes.

Leadership for improving urban students' academic preparedness

Gandara and Bial (2001) examined evaluative data on the effectiveness of K-12 intervention programs that are specifically designed to increase disadvantaged students' access to post-secondary education. They found that the K-12 interventions appeared to be most effective in improving students' college access when they provided high-quality instruction and academic advisement (Horn & Nunez, 2000). Similarly, Hooker and Brand (2010) reviewed and compared the impacts of interventions that are designed to improve urban students' college readiness. In their program evaluation study, the areas of rigor and academic support appeared to be the most important shared aspects of the programs in terms of promoting college readiness and success. Therefore, consistent with the findings of the current research, in CRASP, school leaders focused on developing and delivering high quality instruction and a rigorous high school curriculum to contribute to urban students' college retention and success (Choy, 2001).

The previous studies also noticed that urban students from low-income families tend to have low college and academic aspirations that prevent them from accessing post-secondary institutions (Howard, 2003; Pitre, 2006). For this reason, the College Board (2010) and ASCA (2012) recommend that educational leaders create a school culture that promotes college aspirations among all urban students. Particularly, school leaders are encouraged to establish a school culture that sets and maintains high academic expectations for every student (Howard, 2003). School leaders are also responsible for creating an academic program and scheduling system that gives equal access to college preparatory and advanced placement courses for all students (Toldson, Braithwaite, & Rentie, 2009). In summary, to improve every student's academic preparedness for college, school leaders are held responsible for ensuring that every underprivileged urban child receives high quality instruction, a rigorous curriculum, and systematic academic advisement and support (ACT, 2005; Choy, 2001; Gandara & Bial, 2001; Hooker & Brand, 2010; Horn & Nunez, 2000).

In keeping with the studies cited above, during the implementation of CRASP, school leaders worked with key stakeholders to design several academic support programs. For example, school leaders initiated a dual enrolment program to provide urban high school students with an opportunity to take college level courses from local colleges. The dual enrolment program gave urban students a sense of what college academics is like. In addition to offering extra academic support through peer and teacher tutoring programs, as a part of the CRASP, school leaders developed a school-wide SAT preparation program to prepare all students for college entrance exams. Since taking AP and honor classes helps urban students develop college-level

academic skills and impress college admissions officers, the school leaders worked with each department to offer comprehensive AP and honor courses.

Leadership for enhancing urban students' personal and social development

Creating a school environment that allows every urban child to participate in enrichment and extracurricular activities is considered to be another important role of educational leaders (College Board, 2010; ASCA, 2012). In addition to improving the academic development of each child, educational leaders are encouraged to create a school culture that nourishes the personal, social and emotional development of all students. The College Board (2010) in particular recommends that school leaders provide all students with equitable exposure to a wide range of extracurricular and enrichment opportunities. Ultimately, enrichment and extracurricular engagement enable students to build leadership skills, nurture their talents and interests, and increase their engagement with school (Tinto, 1987).

Besides increasing students' leadership and interpersonal and social skills, participating in enrichment and extracurricular activities can help students get into colleges. For instance, Cabrera, Burkum & La Nasa, (2005) provide an overview of college admissions criteria employed in the United States. Their study found that American colleges and universities employ multiple admissions criteria when screening college applicants. In the past, post-secondary institutions focused solely on test scores and high school GPA (Cabrera, Burkum, & La Nasa, 2005). However, in the twenty-first century, non-academic factors such as leadership experience, involvement in community services, and participation in extracurricular activities are all taken into consideration. Like colleges, employers are also seeking well-rounded applicants who have solid academic backgrounds as well as strong leadership and social skills. It is therefore crucial for school leaders to create a school organization that ensures equitable access to a wide range of extracurricular and enrichment opportunities.

Parallel to Cabrera, Burkum and La Nasa's (2005) study, in 2001 the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) surveyed 1,600 institutions to identify college acceptance trends. They found that American colleges and universities place a heavy emphasis on the academic readiness of students, such as grades in college preparatory courses (77.8%), high school rankings and college entrance exams (57.7%), and grades in all subjects (42.6%). However, it seems that there are also non-academic factors, such as the ability to pay (0.9%), samples of written essays (19.6%), interviews (10.6%), recommendation letters (29.3%), involvement in community service (8.1%), and participation in work/extracurricular activities (7%), which all affect post-secondary admission decisions. As Cabrera, Burkum, and La Nasa (2005) indicated, the college admission criteria of American colleges and universities has been changing, and post-secondary institutions increasingly value applicants' leadership experience and extracurricular involvements.

To that end, during the implementation of CRASP, school leaders collaborated with key stakeholders to incorporate support for enrichment and extracurricular engagement into academics. For instance, school leaders initiated a school-wide career day and invited many speakers and presenters from different fields to share their

perspectives and give all students first-hand career experience. In another instance, school leaders tasked counselors with scheduling field trips for all students to visit college open houses and college fairs. These types of extracurricular activities were a good way for students to learn about many colleges and get a brief snapshot of them (College Board, 2010).

Leadership for preparing financially ready and responsible urban students

In addition to a lack of academic and social readiness, previous research has reported that a lack of financial readiness is another crucial factor that directly or indirectly affects disadvantaged urban students' school success and college readiness (ACT, 2010). In a national study of minority students' college attrition rates, American College Testing (ACT, 2010) asked Hispanic and African American students to rate the degrees to which student and institutional factors affected their attrition. The study found that the factors with the highest impact on Hispanic and African American student retention included adequacy of personal financial resources, amount of financial aid available to students, and students' low socio-economic status, all of which are highly associated with financial readiness.

As Ishitani and DesJardins (2002) noticed, most low-income students who lack financial readiness are less likely to be prepared for college. For instance, urban students whose parents have no or limited funds are less likely to participate in SAT and ACT preparation programs to improve their test scores (Holcomb-McCoy, 2010). The same students are less likely to attend colleges' summer programs and enrichment camps to experience college campus life and earn college credits while in high school. College summer institutes, dual enrolment programs, and college and career related activities are great opportunities for urban students to become college ready. Yet it might be very challenging—in some cases, almost impossible—for many low-income families to subsidize these types of college enrichment and extracurricular activities (ACT, 2010).

As previous studies indicated, each year, a significant number of urban students either do not enroll in college or stop their college education because of financial problems (ACT, 2005). Since financial issues play a significant role in urban students' school and college success, school leaders are encouraged to create a support system for urban students who lack funds to (a) pay the enrolment and preparation fees for the college entrance exams, (b) participate in college dual enrolment and summer programs, or (c) pay for college tuition and other college-related expenses (Grodsky & Jones, 2004; Holcomb-McCoy, 2010).

The College Board (2010) recommends that school leaders develop programs that provide students and families with comprehensive information regarding college costs, options for paying for college, and the financial aid and scholarship processes. If both urban parents and students are informed about the eligibility requirements, they are more likely to plan in advance and thus afford a college education. Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos and Sanbonmatsu (2009) also report that students who received systematic assistance with the FAFSA and information about aid are substantially more likely to submit the required financial aid applications, enroll in college, and receive financial aid.

Consistent with these recommendations, during the implementation of CRASP, the school leaders tasked counselors with simplifying the FAFSA application and providing information about college affordability. In collaboration with counselors and other key stakeholders, school leaders focused on developing a personalized financial aid counseling system, a fee-waiver program, and workshops that aimed to help every urban student navigate the complex financial aid planning process.

Leadership for easing urban students' college admission and transition processes

Due to a lack of contextual information and guidance about college admission processes, many urban students graduate ready to attend four-year colleges, but never apply or enroll (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2007; Hooker & Brand, 2010). Many urban students find online college application processes very stressful and complicated, and they do not receive sufficient guidance and support during their college application and college transition journey (Griffin, Allen, Kimura-Walsh, & Yamamura, 2007). Therefore, the availability of a strong support system plays a crucial role for urban students navigating post-secondary pathways.

As recommended by previous research studies, in order to ease urban students' college admission and transition processes, as a part of CRASP, school leaders developed the following student services, which included personalized support in (1) college essay writing, (2) college searches, (3) college applications, (4) career counseling, (5) requesting recommendation letters, transcript, and other supplements, (6) fee waivers, (7) career assessments, and (8) college enrolment and transition (ASCA, 2012; College Board, 2010; Conley, 2007; Dahir & Stone, 2012). In order to establish a college-going culture in elementary through high school and beyond, school leaders built a systematic partnership and working relationship with key stakeholders. They also created a school counseling department that has a low student and counselor ratio to meet the complex needs of students.

Regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, or socioeconomic and family background, every urban student deserves to have a school leader who won't give up on them and who will encourage and support their college and career aspirations. The four components for promoting a college-going culture have the capacity to provide school leaders with a comprehensive framework to build college and career readiness for all students. Moreover, as the previous studies indicated, with the emphasis on having every urban student graduate college and career ready, educational leaders are encouraged to act as change agents, student advocates, consultants, co-ordinators, collaborators, managers of resources, and facilitators.

Methods

School setting

This study was conducted at an urban public school. The 2000 census data show that less than 9 percent of the population in this city holds a Bachelor's degree or higher, and over 25 percent of families are below the poverty level, with a median household income of $32,778. This urban school is not a selective college preparatory school. As reported in the 2015 report card, the admissions policy and evalua-

tion criteria for this school is non-discriminatory and is designed to ensure equal opportunity for interested applicants, grades K through 12. The population of this urban school is 1,039 students. Approximately 90 percent of students in this school are enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program (Yavuz, 2014). Additionally, 3.4 percent of the student population is white, and 85 percent of the school's population is African American or Hispanic.

Research design and participants

The participants of this study were cohorts (classes 2009–2013). The data were collected over a few years, the researcher used the existing data, and the participants were not studied throughout the years; this study can thus be considered a quantitative study with predictive analysis. Similar to an interrupted time series design, a pre-test followed by multiple post-tests were utilized to measure the impacts of comprehensive interventions on underrepresented urban students' college access. Each year, an average of 77 senior students graduated from this particular urban public school.

The implementation of CRASP began in September 2009. Thus, the first cohort (class of 2009) did not participate in the comprehensive support program. Each succeeding cohort (class of 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013) had one additional year of the program. In this study, urban students' college enrolment was identified as a dependent variable to compare the college access of urban students who participated in the program for different lengths of time (from zero to four years). The independent variables with possible implications for students' college access were determined to be high school initial GPA (0 lowest, 4 highest), education status (English second language learner or special education), parent education (college graduate or not), lunch type (paid, free, or reduced), gender (female, male) and race (African American, Hispanic, white).

The participants' demographic information was 59 percent female, 41 percent male, 42 percent African American, 13 percent white, and 46 percent Hispanic/Latino. In terms of academic achievement, participants' initial GPA was also calculated as 2.53 out of 4.00. In order to test for differences between the characteristics of students who did respond to the survey and those of students who did not respond, the one-way ANOVA results were used; there were no statistically significant differences found for Race, Gender, Transfer In, Lunch Type, Parent Education, Initial Grade Point Average, Special Education and English second language learners at the alpha = .05 level (p-value > .05). The CRASP that includes 19 interventions was implemented for the whole school without excluding any student. For this reason, the participants in the study can be considered as representative of the student body as a whole. Besides the school's archived data, in the survey, students were asked to indicate whether or not they participate in the program.

Instrumentation and data collection

The alumni survey was prepared to gather information about the college experiences of former students. The survey, approved by the Institutional Review Board, was composed of closed questions with Likert-type response scales. The first section includes background information and college data. The second section of the survey

includes 19 academic and counseling programs that may make a possible contribution to urban students' college goals. Students were asked to indicate if they participated in these school counseling services and academic programs when they were in high school.

The survey was prepared through a popular online data collection system. Emails that included the survey link were sent to a total of 305 graduated students. Students completed the survey after they graduated from high school. A total of 56 percent of alumni (171 out of 305) successfully completed the online survey in the fall of 2013. After all the surveys were collected and coded, results were stored in an alumni tracking folder that is not available to others.

Other data sources were also used for this investigation. For example, the researcher used the computerized student information system, which contains each student's demographic information, GPA, lunch type, test results, and report cards. The official College Board SAT results were used as another data source, as well as the "Student Tracker," a web-based program designed by National Clearinghouse to help high schools track their alumni's college enrolment data. The NJ Standards Measurement and Resource for Teaching (NJ SMART), a comprehensive statewide longitudinal data warehouse, was also used in this study, as were the researcher's individual counseling logs and alumni follow-up data.

Data analysis

SPSS was used for the analysis of quantitative data. The closed-ended questionnaire responses were numerically coded, and a dataset was created in an Excel sheet to use the SPSS. The collected data and student achievement data were compiled according to cohort year. During the data analysis, the researcher combined the data from the survey responses and existing archive dataset. Students' program involvement data came from the survey responses, while the researcher used existing databases to report demographic and achievement data such as SAT scores, college enrolment, GPA, lunch type, parent education, transfer in and out data, special education and ESL status. All these combined data were compiled into the master dataset to complete the required analysis.

After the coding process was complete, a descriptive analysis, which included frequencies (sample, independent, and dependent variables), measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode), and measures of variability (variance and standard deviation), was used to explore and summarize the critical characteristics of the predictor variables. Following the descriptive analysis, both binary logistic regression and multiple linear regression analyses were administered using the SPSS program to examine the effect of the comprehensive interventions on urban students' college enrolment.

Results

In this study, post-secondary enrolment rates in four-year and two-year colleges, military, vocational, and technical schools are used as the indicators of post-secondary access of urban students. First, in order to investigate how students' college enrolment rates are associated with program participation, the researcher prepared a data

chart that shows the students' college enrolment from cohort 2009 to 2013. As reported in Table 1, it appears that the urban students' college enrolment rate in this particular school is positively associated with students' program participation. It appears that the urban students who stay in CRASP for a longer amount of time are more likely to enroll in post-secondary institutions. On average, in 2009, while only 77 percent of non-CRASP urban students enrolled in post-secondary education, 97 percent of students who had participated in CRASP for years enrolled in a post-secondary institution.

Table 1. Summary of Linear Logistic Regression Analysis for Program Participation and Variables Predicting Post-Secondary Enrolment (*N* = 384)

Years in program	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*SE*
0	77	.77	.426	.049
1	90	.82	.384	.041
2	83	.88	.328	.036
3	71	.96	.203	.024
4	63	.97	.177	.022
Total	384	.87	.334	.017

Besides descriptive statistics, the researcher also performed a binary logistic regression model. Regression Table 2 reports that the numbers of years spent in CRASP has a significant positive effect on post-secondary enrolment when other demographics—gender, race, education status, family background, transferring status, and prior academic standing—were included in the regression model. It appears that students who stayed in the program for longer were more likely to enroll in post-secondary institutions when other demographics factors were controlled. Regression Table 2 also indicates that parent education, initial GPA, and special education were significantly associated with post-secondary enrolment.

Table 2. Summary of Linear Logistic Regression Analysis for Years in Program and Variables Predicting Post-Secondary Enrolment

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	p	Exp(B)
Transfer in	-.470	.397	1.402	1	.236	.625
Parent education	1.763	.651	7.342	1	.007*	5.831
Gender	-.399	.347	1.320	1	.251	.671
Lunch type	-.251	.364	.477	1	.490	.778
Special ESL	-1.109	.474	5.473	1	.019*	.330
Initial GPA	.451	.221	4.180	1	.041*	1.570
Black	-.641	.638	1.007	1	.316	.527
Hispanic	.139	.661	.044	1	.834	1.149
Years in program	.575	.143	16.175	1	.000*	1.778
Constant	.607	.915	.441	1	.507	1.835

Note: R2 = .225

The binary logistic regression model indicated that years spent in the program were positively related with post-secondary enrolment. However, since this study attempts to determine the extent to which specific interventions helped participating students, the first regression model did not provide enough information about the specific effect size of each program component. Therefore, a stepwise regression model was conducted with the components of the program that were considered potential contributors to post-secondary enrolment.

Table 3. Summary of Stepwise Binary Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Post-Secondary Enrolment (*N* = 171)

Model	B	S.E.	Wald	df	p	Exp(B)
Parent education	2.063	1.087	3.604	1	.058	7.872
Peer tutoring	19.147	5.285	.000	1	.997	206.363
Instant decision days	2.041	.725	7.921	1	.005*	7.695
Home visits	2.499	1.142	4.794	1	.029*	12.176
Group counseling	-2.032	.967	4.410	1	.036*	.131
Constant	.315	.351	.805	1	.370	1.371

Note: R2 = .437

Table 3 shows that instant decision days and home visits have a statistically significant positive relationship with post-secondary enrolment when other variables are controlled. However, there was a statistically significant inverse relationship between group counseling meetings and post-secondary enrolment. This relationship is certainly not an intended effect of group counseling meetings, and its implications are discussed in the next section.

Limitations of the study

As with all studies, in interpreting the results of this study, the reader must take several limitations into consideration. First, 95 percent of the participants were African American or Hispanic, so white and Asian students are not adequately represented in this study. In addition, the whole sample was from one school. Students' characteristics and unique institutional factors might account for some of the outcomes. An important methodological limitation is that students and the research site were not randomly selected. Instead, the researcher used the sample of convenience for this investigation.

This study attempted to control for pre-existing characteristics of the students and their families that may have been associated with their college enrolment choices. However, the study cannot guarantee that selection bias due to other unmeasured background characteristics does not affect the results. Since only 171 urban students completed the survey, small sample size can be considered another limitation. Considering the small sample size and the wide range of the 19 interventions documented, this study is not readily generalizable to other contexts. Further studies with larger samples that focus on just a few of the interventions would provide more clarity around the generalizability of the findings. The other limitation is that the re-

searcher, who was actively involved in the research, is also the creator and evaluator of CRASP. This means that he has much knowledge and many insights into the program, and while this is useful it also can be considered a potential source of bias. To address this limitation, the researcher worked and consulted with an advisory board that included the school principal, vice principals, professional counselors, teachers, and external experts in program evaluation.

Discussion

The results of this study assert that in collaboration with different stakeholders, school leaders can design comprehensive student services that significantly facilitate urban students' college enrolment. In particular, this study finds a statistically significant positive relationship between parent education, instant decision days, home visits, and college enrolment. This section will move beyond these results to describe their implications for leadership, practice, and policy that can help schools improve college access for underrepresented urban students.

As indicated in Table 1, the results show a significant positive change in college enrolment for cohorts of students who participated in the CRASP school reform compared to those who did not. The percentage of cohort students enrolling in college during their first year out of high school rose by twenty percentage points over the non-CRASP students. This evidence suggests that the presence of CRASP at this particular urban school helped significantly more students enter post-secondary education.

The regression analyses results in both Table 2 and 3 indicate that along with CRASP, parent education is linearly associated with a higher probability of college enrolment. It appears that urban students whose parents went to college have a significantly higher college enrolment rate compared to "first-generation" college-bound students. Since not all urban students are first-generation, the implication of these findings is that educational leaders, school counselors, and key stakeholders must be more concerned about the first-generation students, who are less likely to receive proper support during their college application and enrolment process. For example, one action for school leaders and counselors to take is to identify first-generation college-bound students and give extra personalized attention to their needs (Yavuz, 2016). After these students are identified in the early grades, this list should be shared with teachers, counselors, and all other related key stakeholders in order to ensure that every first-generation student receives individualized support during their academic and college planning.

This study also found that both initial GPA and special education status have significant effects on the urban students' college enrolment when other variables are controlled. Particularly, it is noted that special education students have a lower college enrolment rate compared to general education students. Therefore, another action for school leaders and key stakeholders to take is to give extra attention to the needs of special education students and students who have a low initial GPA. Starting in grades eight and nine, students who have a low GPA and low standardized test scores should be placed in ongoing personalized learning plans and academic advising programs. In addition, school leaders are encouraged to pay particular attention to ensuring that special education students receive proper test taking and instruc-

tional accommodations to which they are entitled through their Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) or Section 504 accommodations.

Out of nineteen CRASP interventions, only two interventions—instant decision days and home visits—had significant positive effects on post-secondary enrolment when other related independent variables were included. In the first case, instant decision days could explain the significant increase in urban students' post-secondary enrolment, because instant decision days provide urban students with an opportunity to meet directly with college admissions counselors and ask their questions regarding college admission and financial aid. Furthermore, instant decision days both ease and speed up the students' college applications, because students have the opportunity to receive an immediate answer as to whether or not they have been accepted or granted an academic scholarship. All urban students who participate in instant decision days receive personalized support and do not pay the college application fee. High school seniors save an average of $300 on their college applications over the course of the instant decision days. The findings of this study suggest that urban schools should continue to organize instant decision days to improve students' post-secondary enrolment.

In the second case, results indicate that the impact of home visits on post-secondary enrolment is statistically significant. It seems that students whose homes were visited were more likely to enroll in post-secondary institutions. During the home visits, both students and parents received information about the college admission process. They were also informed about the college enrolment process and successful post-secondary education transition. It is expected that parents who become knowledgeable about the college admission and enrolment process will be more likely to encourage their children to enroll in college. This parental involvement in and commitment to improving urban students' chances of college enrolment explain the significant variance in post-secondary enrolment rate.

Finally, the findings show a statistically significant inverse relationship between group counseling meetings and post-secondary enrolment. This relationship is certainly not an intended effect of group counseling meetings. In general, referred students who need extensive support participate in systematic, small group counseling sessions such as test anxiety, test taking strategies, and anger management techniques. In these small group sessions, school counselors interact with each referred student and build caring relationships. It is surprising that these students have a significantly lower college enrolment rate compared to their peers. The implication of this is that school leaders can encourage counselors to expand the group counseling sessions beyond the selected topics, in order to provide the resources and knowledge that help referred students enroll in post-secondary institutions.

It should be noted that disadvantaged students' college readiness and success is a very complex and ongoing process (Wozniak, 2013). The causality for college access might not run in one particular direction. It means there might be multiple explanations for low college access of students who were referred to small group counseling sessions. For example, it could be that counselors are more likely to meet with students who have serious personal, social, emotional or family problems.

Implications for educational leadership in improving student services and college access

Since district- and school-level leaders play profound roles in designing, delivering, and leading student services, this section focuses on specific implications for educational leaders, which are (1) building shared vision and mission, (2) creating community-wide efforts, (3) planning low student and counselor ratio, and (3) making data-driven decision about the design and delivery of student services.

As previous research studies reported, underprivileged urban students receive limited support from their parents and communities and do not envision college education. Therefore, it is important that school leaders build high expectations and a shared vision for improving the achievement and college access of every underrepresented urban student. To that end, this study suggests school leaders pay extra attention to creating a shared vision and mission of college readiness for all. School leaders are encouraged to facilitate ongoing professional development activities regarding the school vision and to drive community-wide discussions about high expectations, equity, and access for all students. It is also important that leaders encourage every key stakeholder to contribute to open and honest dialogue and discussion about ongoing school improvement and student outcomes.

This study resonates with previous research and indicates that designing, delivering, and leading comprehensive student services requires multi-faceted approaches and collaborative efforts among school leaders, counselors, teachers, and community members (Brazer & Peters, 2007; Loza, 2003). To develop, maintain, and enhance comprehensive student services through collaborative efforts, school principals are encouraged to participate in weekly counselor meetings and to consider the director of student services as a permanent member of the executive team. During these meetings, the major barriers and challenges that schools may encounter in program initiation and implementation can be discussed and identified. Like counselor and principal partnership, teacher and school leader partnership also plays an important role in designing effective student services to improve students' outcomes. In particular, school leaders can work with teachers to arrange classroom guidance activities and to prepare students for the college entrance tests.

Furthermore, in order to design and lead comprehensive student services, school leaders are encouraged to partner with parents. Specifically, school leaders can organize monthly parent workshop series that include financial aid, college awareness, and career readiness. Handbooks, online resources, and home visits can be also arranged to build partnership with parents and to discuss students' college and career preparation plans, as well as their academic and personal development. School leaders can also build partnerships with community agencies and local colleges to create and help promote a college-going culture that includes college trips, career days, internship programs, financial aid nights, scholarship programs, mentoring programs, instant decision days, and college days.

In this study, CRASP had nineteen interventions that were designed to help all students to be successful, lifelong learners, college and career ready. In order to design these nineteen programs and provide each student with an intensive individualized college and career counseling sessions from K to 12, this study recommends

each urban school to have one school counselor for every 160 students. However, based on ASCA's (2012) statistics, the average ratio of students to counselors in middle and high schools is around 500 to 1. The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250 to 1. In a high-poverty urban school, designing comprehensive student services and providing ongoing individualized support to 250 low-income first-generation students does not seem realistic or feasible for a single school counselor. School leaders can therefore consider minimizing the student to counselor ratio. If it is not possible in the short term because of budgetary constraints, they can explore alternative ways to maximize the effectiveness of their current counselors through preparing an annual principal and counselor agreement.

Finally, in order to improve every student's success through implementing comprehensive student services, school leaders can consider utilizing continuous assessments and comprehensive data. Having a strong accountability system will enable leaders to prioritize interventions and differentiate programs to meets the needs of all students, including first-generation low-income college-bound students, second language learners, and special education students who need systematic and ongoing supportive services. Therefore, when designing and leading student services, it is recommended that school leaders make data-driven decisions while (1) analyzing student needs, (2) prioritizing and planning academic and counseling programs, (3) measuring and demonstrating the effectiveness of interventions, and (4) guiding the program's improvement (Carey & Dimmitt, 2012).

Implications for future research

Throughout these findings and discussion, this researcher has attempted to measure the impact of the program on underrepresented urban students' college access. The findings inspired the researcher to ask new questions that can lead to further research, and these questions may have a broader impact and additional applications for educational leadership. For example, some important questions remain regarding the program's implementation. First, can this comprehensive program have the same or similar impact on other urban schools that serve mostly disadvantaged minority students? Since this study was limited to one location, the researcher intends to replicate this study at other urban schools to investigate whether or not the same or similar results are found.

These findings provided evidence that the program has positive effects on disadvantaged students' access. However, we do not yet have enough information about how the program affects students' college attainment. Therefore, future research can investigate the impact of the program on college attainment. One avenue of future research would be to compare the graduation rates of program participants and non-program participants. This attainment research could be considered as a continuation of this study and could also provide valuable information about improving disadvantaged students' college graduation rates. In order to conduct this future study, this researcher will continue to collect data from graduated students.

Finally, in this study, this researcher only utilized quantitative data to measure the impacts of interventions on students' college readiness and success. Therefore, future research might want to utilize a mixed methods approach to investigate students'

individual experiences with program participation. Instead of quantitative measures, future research might want to use open-ended questions or interviews to explore the ways in which urban students felt the program prepared them for college. Unlike a quantitative methodology, a mixed methods design encourages participants to share their own feelings of college readiness based on their experiences in the program.

Conclusion

Educational leaders and policymakers seek to solve problems that interfere with underserved urban students' low college access. This study offers school administrators, policymakers, school counselors, and teachers practical information and strategies for designing and implementing comprehensive student services. In line with the new college and career readiness accountability standards, the findings of this research urge for further investigations of the roles of school leaders in creating research-based and innovative comprehensive interventions that have the capacity to improve college access for urban students.

The findings of this study also support the view that when highly trained educational leaders and professional school counselors deliver comprehensive intervention programs, underprivileged urban students experience measurable benefits in their college access. Thus, to prepare all underserved urban students for college and career, school leaders should set high expectations and provide ongoing support and guidance for every educator (Carey & Dimmitt, 2012; College Board, 2010; Coleman, 1988). In designing, leading, and evaluating comprehensive school counseling programs, school leaders and counselors act as advocates, consultants, co-ordinators, collaborators, managers of resources, and facilitators, with the aim of college and career readiness for all students regardless of their gender, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, or family background (Dahir & Stone, 2012). With such effective leadership, in the near future, America might have the highest proportion of college readiness, college access, and college graduation in the world.

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