

## Closing the College Knowledge Gap

Closing the college knowledge gap requires engaging students in “authentic” postsecondary discussions as soon as preschool children affirm their first dreams and aspirations, “I want to be...” Regardless of racial or socioeconomic backgrounds, authentic conversations begin the process of explaining schooling within a long-term context—“*This is why we learn to read, understand math, and explore science.*” Introducing students to meaningful, relevant, and enabling texts becomes an unforced and natural extension of current learning within a college and career readiness context. Such efforts would result in fewer children being marginalized due to institutional neglect and the oftentimes conscious withholding of the information required to conceptualize comprehensive college and career plans.

## College Planning Cohorts™ (CPCs)

*College Planning Cohorts™*, also structured as less rigorous Book Club Cohorts™ (BCCs), is a successful model developed through the 7-year faith-based partnership between the Foundation for Ensuring Access and Equity and the Turner Chapel AWE Church Education Ministry. *Group Leaders* and *Small Group Coaches* guide students and families through the process of conceptualizing comprehensive postsecondary plans. Large group presentations, small group discussions, and self-guided instructional activities, increase students’ academic behaviors, focus on service and leadership, and expand postsecondary pathways to technical schools, community colleges, 4-year institutions, military enlistment, or directly into the workplace.

## A Research-responsive Model

Our model is not in competition with or in place of research-based programs focused on increasing college readiness, or such programs as AVID, GEAR UP, or TRIO. *College Planning Cohorts™* represents a constantly evolving set of *research-responsive* strategies—a constantly evolving set of research-responsive strategies—responsive to research pertaining to student subgroups who are disproportionately underrepresented in AP, IB, and honors-level classes, who experience disproportionately low high school graduation and college matriculation rates, who ‘undermatch’ in the colleges they apply to, and who, as a result of making the wrong college choice, are less likely to attain their degree and more likely to incur thousands of dollars in student loan debt.



## Scope of Engagement

The often quoted African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child” is actualized through *College Planning Cohorts™*, which cultivate conversational communities where teachers, coaches, tutors, mentors, and counselors become participants of authentic conversations regarding such areas as students’ gifts and talents, challenges and obstacles, attitudes and behaviors toward learning, tardiness, absenteeism, disciplinary infractions, leadership, community service, and study habits. Through these conversations and self-reflective narratives, students are continually engaged in critical thinking, self-assessment, goal setting, and conceptualizing plans to maximize school and community resources within the long-term context of each students’ college or career aspirations.

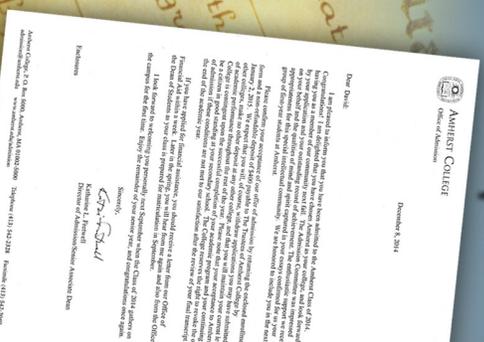
## Faith and Community Partnerships

Navigating postsecondary pathways is more difficult for students from underrepresented groups, those who will be the first in their family to attend college, undocumented students, and students from schools with a disproportionate student-counselor ratio. Developing faith and community partnerships is a critical component to increasing student achievement. Therefore, expanding students’ postsecondary pathways. Since 2007, students participating in the Turner Chapel AWE Church’s College Planning Cohorts have been guided into a broad range of highly publicized postsecondary pathways, earning millions of dollars in scholarships and institutional aid—including Gates Millennium Scholars, Posse Foundation Scholars, and full merit- and need-based institutional scholarships to selective colleges and universities.



# College Planning Cohorts™

“Success in Small Groups”



P.O. Box 70457 Marietta, GA 30007  
Phone (678) 395-5825 FAX (678) 620-3685  
[www.accessandequity.org](http://www.accessandequity.org)  
A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

## Relevance, Relationships, and Rigor

Educators generally agree that, “Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships,” are key components to creating high performing schools and engaged classrooms. However, the *College Planning Cohort™* model realigns these components, seeking first to capture the attention of students by showing them the relevance of the work involved.

### Relevance

Students engage in self-reflective activities designed to lead them to deeper levels of thinking about their futures—futures in which their dreams and aspirations are conceptualized within a college or career context. Through self-assessment students engage in authentic conversations pertaining to the issues, obstacles, and challenges—whether societal, community, family, or self-imposed—faced by students and families.

### Relationships

Relationships develop within the context of how we can help *them* overcome the challenges and obstacles to achieve the dreams and aspirations *they* have for themselves. Subsequently, relationships between students, Group Leaders, and Small Group Coaches develop through a shared belief that *we* are vested in *their* success. Each college acceptance letter, institutional award, and private scholarship reflects a shared success between Group Leaders, Small Group Coaches, students, and parents.



### Rigor

Rigor is embedded in the expectations of the CPCs and BCCs—college and financial aid research, essay writing, résumé development, career exploration, assessing gifts and talents within a Multiple Intelligences framework—and supported through the collaborative engagement of parents, peers, Group Leaders, and Small Group Coaches. This support and collaboration serves as a guide through the comprehensive immersion in postsecondary research, assessment, planning, and preparation.



### Differentiated Instruction

The structure of the cohort and instructional delivery is differentiated through content, process, product, and the learning environment. Students engage in large group presentations, small group discussions, self-guided lessons, videos, Internet searches, independent research, interviewing, one-on-one conversations, and guest speakers. Students process and synthesize learning immediately by being continually engaged in planning their postsecondary pathways based on research, their achievement level, and family circumstances. Learning is hands-on and conversations are authentic as students become self-directed and intrinsically motivated learners.

### Formative Assessments

This model makes use of formative assessments, considered by many educators to be the most powerful type of assessment for improving student understanding and performance. Formative assessments occur as



students engage in the process of making meaning of college and career planning content and integrating learning into what they already know. Feedback is immediate, enabling students to change their behaviors and understandings as they experience daily epiphanies. These assessments enable Group Leaders and Small Group Coaches to continually examine instructional strategies, make adjustments to activities, differentiate instruction to meet student needs, respond to student aspirations, and fine-tune students’ postsecondary plans and pathways.

### Student Engagement

Student cohorts typically reflect a broad range of interests, ability levels, learning styles, personality types, and energy levels. While some cohorts are comprised of students from a single school or grade level, others are formed with students from multiple schools and across grade levels; more over, it is common and, important, for students to form bonds through shared aspirations, encouragement, peer support, and gentle nudging.

