MEASURING STUDENT "CAPITAL" BEYOND THE CLASSROOM:

How school leaders' knowledge of students' Familial Capital can support College and Career

Readiness.

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ABSTRACT

The emphasis on College and Career Readiness for secondary schools has often been at the forefront of educational reform. There is a shared understanding amongst secondary school leaders and educators that students graduating from high school should be ready to enter postsecondary institutions or the workforce. However, more often than not, minority and economically disadvantaged students struggle to transition from high school to college, specifically in the college application process. According to *Hooker and Brand, 2010,* social, informational, and financial barriers impede students' access to postsecondary learning; As a result, school leaders, teachers, and school counselors are often charged to remove those barriers; thus becoming students' familial capital.

Familial capital is students' acquisition of norms, values, and expectations established through family relationships. Familial Capital (wealth) incites cultural transfusion into other community-based social networks and activities (Yosso, 2005). Familial capital is often limited in high schools that serve a large population of minority and economically underserved students. As a result, students' access to support with the college application process is restricted to the services provided by the school. Moreover, there is no official requirement or mechanism for high schools to identify students who lack familial capital. This perpetuates a cycle of impersonalized college application counseling that directly opposes the ideal tiered support approach.

The following action research project investigated how school leaders assess students' level of familial capital, which could be used to provide used and tiered interventions when supporting them in completing their college applications. Key findings from this study include, (a) 30% of our freshmen did not have a college or career goal, (b) 30% of our students have

parents who speak to them one-on-one about college planning, and (c) 55% of our students indicated that their mom speaks to them about college preparedness.

INTRODUCTION

Our Cahn project investigated our school's approach to college counseling by exploring student access to familial capital. We selected this project after experiencing difficulty getting students to complete their college applications. The project consists of a year-long process of discussion with various stakeholders, implementing student surveys, and conducting student interviews. By the end of the project, we developed a survey tool to assess students' level of familial capital and expanded our school-wide Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) model to include tiered supports for college counseling.

The site for our action research project was our school, York Early College Academy, affectionately known as YECA. This institution is a 6-12 early college school in South Jamaica, Queens, New York. The student population is made up of 605 students from diverse backgrounds.49% identify as Black, 10% LatinX, 27% Asians/Native Hawaiians/other Pacific Islanders, 1% White, and 1% American Indian or Alaska Native (nysed.gov, 2022). Furthermore, YECA serves a population of 19% of students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), and 2% are English Language Learners. 76% of YECA students receive free or reduced lunch.

Although YECA is a public school, its unique partnership with CUNY's York College has earned it the distinction of an Early College school. Through the partnership between YECA and York College, YECA students can graduate high school with up to 60 college credits. Currently, 100% of YECA students graduate in four years with a 94% college readiness rate. While YECA student outcomes exceed performance metrics, some students struggle to transition into college.

Collecting informal, anecdotal data revealed that students who struggle to transition into college often lack familial capital. Research indicates that families, schools, and communities play an integral role in influencing the college access trajectory of students (Mitchall & Jaeger,

2018). The family, school, and community should work together to extend students' social and cultural experiences influencing their academic and social skills in preparation for the college milieu. Farrell (2009) explains that student voices are needed to communicate how their experiences in and out of school help them achieve academic goals. Yosso's (2005) familial capital theory guides the current project.

Definition of Terms

Familial Capital

    a. Contextualizes family dynamics and how family members' expectations have helped students set college goals and aspirations.

    b. Identify social community institutions that students are members of (i.e., church, mosque, community organization, local sports team, etc.) and how these institutions impacted college goals and aspirations.

    c. Identify beliefs, values, or expectations shared by students, family members, and communities.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Through our unique partnership with CUNY's York College, our students graduate high school, earning between 3 to 60 college credits. Despite our track record of academic success, there was a small population of students who failed to secure placement in competitive postsecondary programs.

A listening tour was conducted after an administrator of college supervision was appointed. In it, 20 families and 50 current and former students were interviewed. Qualitative data was collected from questions like:

What significant challenges do you face as a parent regarding the college program?

What could we have implemented to support parents and scholars in the program?

Three integral findings emerged after data analysis:

1. Parents highlighted lacking support and knowledge about postsecondary education and the college application process.

2. Parents wanted systems that were intentional about early college counseling.

3. Immigrant families had a limited history with the American postsecondary landscape and were not confident about their abilities to navigate the college application process with their children.

After preliminary literature analysis, the following questions emerged to drive this action research:

1. How do we identify students' familial capital?

2. How do we provide targeted and tiered support to close gaps in our students' familial capital so they can successfully complete the college application process?

To develop the leadership capacity of administrators who serve 6-12 public schools, we must use the opportunity to develop a tool to measure our students' access to familial capital.

The goal should be to expand the college-going culture to provide targeted and tiered support to students most in need of familial capital.

To monitor progress, school building leaders will use data from the 2023-2024 school year as a benchmark and then review the City University of New York (CUNY) Application Admissions Report annually to measure progress. The school building leader of College Supervision will conduct a second round of listening tours after year 4 to measure family response to intervention.

METHODS

This section describes the methodological procedures undertaken in this study. The phenomenological research method aligned with the researcher's interest in understanding how school leaders can develop a system to identify familial capital gaps regarding college goals and aspirations amongst their students and tiered supports can be put in place to close those gaps. Phenomenology was applied in this study; it was necessary to probe into unique experiences that were not typically examined daily (Merriam, 2002).

Central Research Question

How do we develop a system to identify familial capital gaps regarding college goals and aspirations amongst our students, and what tiered supports can we put in place to close that gap?

Setting

For the current research, participants were grade nine students at an urban secondary school with a 6-12 grade-level organization in the New York City public school system. As students who started this school in grade six, they share similar experiences at the secondary school, at home, and within the school community. This institution has served the community for more than ten years admitting students who live within the district's designated locale. The enrollment statistics at this school during the data collection was 49% Blacks, 10% Hispanics, 27% Asians/Native Hawaiians/other Pacific Islanders, 1% White, and 1% American Indian or Alaska Native (nysed.gov, 2022). This public high school is positioned in an urban community where 75% of students live in low-income families. Each student has access to a dual enrollment program to promote a college-going culture and address underrepresented students' challenges when transitioning to college. Before they graduate, they have the potential to complete between

3-60 college credits successfully. Students on track to graduate qualify for a Regents or Advanced Regents designation (nysed.gov, 2019).

Some students begin taking college classes in ninth grade and continue until graduation. According to state data, in 2022-2023, the school's graduation rate was 98%, with 47% obtaining Advanced Regents diploma designation. For the 2019-2020 school year, 99% of Black students graduated, with 63% achieving Regents with advanced designation (nysed.gov, 2022). There are six Equity Indicators in New York's ESSA Plan, which include college and career readiness. On a scale of one to four for College, Career, and Civic Readiness, this public high school scored a four for the 2019-2020 school year, indicating that the school prepares students for life beyond high school (nysed.gov, 2020). The intention of providing the information is to contextualize the academic experiences and resources the participants have access to.

Students at YECA graduated at a rate eleven percent higher than the state. Statewide, only forty-two percent graduated with Advanced Regents diploma designation.

Participants

This phenomenological study used a purposeful criterion sampling technique to identify and recruit participants who shared common traits and experienced the same phenomenon. These sampling techniques gave the researchers access to information-rich scenarios with limited resources (Palinkas et al., 2016). Participants selected for this study met the following criteria: 1. high school freshman with an overall GPA between 65 and 100% and proportionally represented the school's demographic. When the methodological approach is phenomenological, the emphasis is on the phenomenon under investigation, typically among 3-15 participants who have experienced the phenomenon. For this study, the researcher recruited 10 participants who met the

recruitment criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Data collection relied heavily on interviews with participants, primarily when the study explored and described the impact of familial capital on college goals and aspirations. The participants' voices played a significant role in providing the analyzed data.

There were several limitations related to the representativeness of the participants. The participants attended the same high school and received the same experiences with the staff, which posed a threat to subject heterogeneity. Participant selection for this study was through criterion sampling, jeopardizing the internal validity of the subjects' selection. Another compromise was the researchers' confidence in ensuring transferability through population validity. This sample did not represent the general student population of a traditional suburban, urban, or rural community, compromising the confidence in generalizing the sample population (Indiana.edu).

Data Collection Procedures

This phenomenological study relied on inquiry focused on justifying the actions of a unique group based on their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The primary data collection sources were semi-structured interviews with individual participants and a focus group who shared unique experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1995). Participants were allowed to share information in their own words during qualitative interviews. Detailed information was gathered to determine the phenomenon's essence (Blackstone, 2012). The various data collection methods employed for this phenomenological study include:

1. Individual interviews through survey

2. Individual focus group interviews

Individual Interviews Through Survey

The researcher gathered data from a Google Forms survey with ten participants. Individual interviews allowed the researcher to see the world through the lens of the participants.

Individual Focus Group Interviews

Six students from the initial individual survey group were chosen from the pool of participants since they were identified as outliers. The individual focus group interview represented a primary qualitative data source.

RESULTS

The Freshman High School College and Career Aspirations Survey was the initial tool used to collect data, This instrument was adapted from Berardi-Demo (2012) and included 23 items that students had to respond to. The items were relevant in gathering information about their family dynamics and resources and how the family impacted their college and career aspirations.

From the participants' responses, some interesting findings emerged. Results indicated that 72% of the participants lived with both parents. However, only 45% of the family members had at least a high school diploma. Further data showed that 64% of the student participants aspired to earn a college degree. Additionally, only 36% of our students have parents who speak to them one-on-one about college planning. Of that 36%, 55% indicated that their mothers speak to them about college preparedness.

To better understand the complexities of students' access to familial capital as a phenomenon, a subgroup of six participants was identified as outliers–student's family support (single-parent household, etc), family educational history, and personal academic or career goals–based on their responses to the survey questions. These outliers were the student's family support (single-parent household, etc), family educational history, and personal academic or career goals.

When asked how the school could support them and their families in preparation for college, 83% shared that they needed a checklist to guide them in completing tasks or actions relevant to their college and career readiness development. They also stated that they needed frequent check-ins and important information to support their progress toward the college application process. Results also suggested that 66% of the participants feel confident their families can help them with the college application process. Regarding the source of information

for college knowledge, 50% prefer to get most of their college knowledge from college students, former college students, or professors. The other 50% would rather rely on their family for this information.
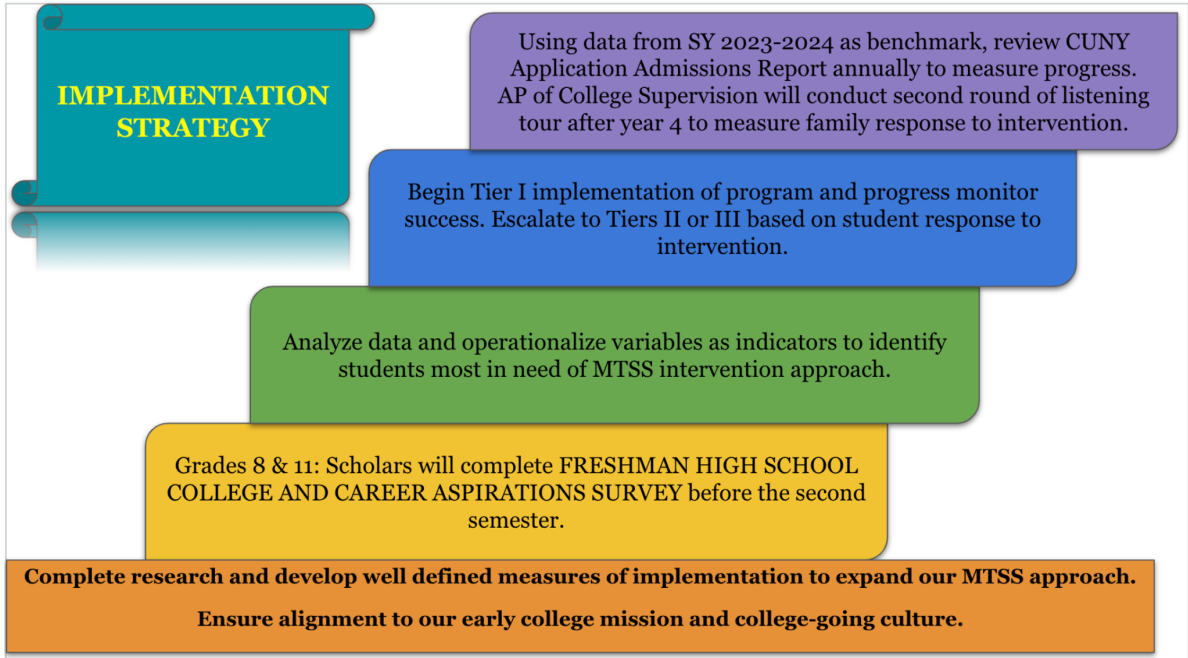
During the action research process, the principal investigators were challenged with finding an instrument to measure students' access to familial capital. Despite the impact this cultural capital has on the aspirations of high school students in forming college goals and aspirations, measuring tools to gauge its impact are limited. To leverage this gap, extensive research was conducted, and a tool was found and adapted, after conducting extensive research, to create the Freshman High School College and Career Aspirations Survey. This tool will be our primary data collection instrument and will be revised over time to align with the evolving college-going culture.

Data from this sample population revealed that some students remain underserved despite the unique effort to create a college-going culture. However, pursuing this action demonstrates the continued effort of the leadership team at York Early College Academy to improve our scholars' academic and social experiences.

Following the results, an implementation strategy will be employed, monitored, and revised. The illustration in *Figure I* provides some details on this strategy.

Figure 1

Implementation Strategy: Identification of Students' Familial Capital Access and Tiered Support

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Using data from SY 2023-2024 as benchmark, review CUNY Application Admissions Report annually to measure progress. AP of College Supervision will conduct second round of listening tour after year 4 to measure family response to intervention.

Begin Tier I implementation of program and progress monitor success. Escalate to Tiers II or III based on student response to intervention.

Analyze data and operationalize variables as indicators to identify students most in need of MTSS intervention approach.

Grades 8 & 11: Scholars will complete FRESHMAN HIGH SCHOOL COLLEGE AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS SURVEY before the second semester.

Complete research and develop well defined measures of implementation to expand our MTSS approach.

Ensure alignment to our early college mission and college-going culture.

REFLECTIONS and FUTURE PLANS

Fellow Reflection:

Throughout my career, I have had the opportunity to participate in many professional development programs. I am proud to say that the Cahn Fellowship has profoundly impacted my professional development as a school leader. With the organization, I had the opportunity to reflect on my leadership through the lens of adult development, systems leadership, and culture and climate. By exploring my leadership within these competencies and engaging with peers and recognized scholars in educational leadership, I have grown immensely in my leadership practice.

Within the competency of adult development, my learning was expanded. Soon, I acknowledged that adults have different ways of processing information. As a result of this new insight, I have transformed how I lead meetings and provide adult professional development. In an innovative approach, I adjusted content, materials, and presentation style to ensure that all forms of comprehension were included. Furthermore, by exploring system leadership through the equity lens, I analyzed my school's data through a more targeted perspective approach. Using skills acquired from the Cahn Fellowship, I expanded my data protocol to include additional opportunities to reflect on the implications of systems and structures on equity within my organization.

Additionally, the Cahn Fellowship elevated my leadership practice in Culture and Climate. By implementing this tool, I recognized gaps within my organization and worked collaboratively with my leadership team to address them. As a result of my leadership growth and engagement in action research with my ally, Dr. Amina Gordon, I became a more reflective, strategic, and empathic school leader.

Through the Cahn experience, my ally and I were able to engage with high-performing peers and exceptional scholars in educational leadership. These interactions and experiences, as well as our weekly one-on-one "think tank" sessions, strengthened our approach to communication, strategic thinking, and self-awareness. In the future, my ally and I will continue to meet regularly and expand our action research.

Ally Reflection

Before officially conducting research, gathering and analyzing data was a major part of my pedagogical practice as a high school mathematics teacher. I carry that same practice and passion as an administrator. When my principal, Dr. Noah Angeles, suggested that I conduct a listening tour, I immediately saw the benefit and acknowledged the value of my role. Our cabinet did a deep dive into the data, found extensive information, and adjusted our college program accordingly. We were stalled with some things, and I kept going back to see what else could be done, but I could not put my hands on it. When I learned about systems thinking with the Cahn Fellowship, the data analysis from the listening tour reverberated as a great source to develop a system. Selecting our action research topic was not a challenge since we had a data pool with problems in practice to address. The Cahn Fellowship program took our college-going culture and climate to the next level. The action research conducted by my principal and I pays homage to the program's emphasis on leadership reflection and growth.

Over the past year as a Cahn Fellowship ally, I had the opportunity to assess my personal leadership styles and practices. I was able to contextualize how I was leading and why I made certain decisions. My principal and I had some productive leadership conversations, which I appreciated. My role takes me off the main campus, which does not afford me the opportunity to engage in daily leadership conversations. During the trips, I forged connections with colleagues in New York and other states. One of my fellow allies even started her administrative program after we formed a bond. The professional and social experiences I gained as a Cahn Fellowship ally will leave an indelible mark on the leader I am and aspire to be.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Section 1 of 4

FRESHMAN HIGH SCHOOL COLLEGE AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS SURVEY

This survey is not a test and will not count for a grade. These questions ask about some of your experiences at home. Please tell us how you really feel. We want to know more about how you and your family think about your future.

* Required

Email *

Valid email

This form is collecting emails. Change settings

What gender do you identify as? *

◯ Male

◯ Female

◯ Prefer not to say

Who are the adults you live with most of the time? *

◯ mom and dad

◯ mom only

◯ dad only

◯ mom and stepfather

◯ stepmother and dad

◯ grandmother/grandfather only

◯ my grandparent and parent

◯ guardian/aunt/uncle/family friend

◯ Other…

Think about the adult who you live with most of the time who went to school for the most number of years. This person: *

○ Did not finish high school

○ Finished high school

○ Attended some college or earned a 2-year degree

○ Finished a 4-year degree

○ Finished a professional or graduate degree after college (examples: law school. medical school. school ...

On my last report card my overall average was *

○ 90-100

○ 80-89

○ 70-79

○ 60-69

○ 50-59

After section 1   Continue to next section   ▾

Section 2 of 4

College Goals & Aspirations   ⌄ ⋮

My College Goal & Aspiration: To what extent do our 9th grade students have aspirational capital as it relates to college goals?

What is the highest level of education you think you will complete? *

○ high school diploma

○ some college

○ technical or trade school degree

○ some technical or trade school

○ college degree : undergraduate, masters, postgraduate degree, Doctoral Degree (MD, PhD, EdD, LLD, etc)

Career Goals & Aspirations

My Career Goals & Aspirations: To what extent do our 9th grade students have aspirational capital as it relates to career goals? Please tell us about what you want to do later in life after you finish all your schooling.

After completing my education, I would like to have a career as a: *

Short answer text

I think I would like this career because

Description (optional)

How long have you been interested in this career? *

☐ Recently (this year)

☐ For a few years

☐ For as long as I can remember

Please write down three steps you can take to prepare yourself for this career while you are in school *

Long answer text

Think about the career you identified in Question 6. What is the highest level of education you think you will need to be successful in that career? *

○ high school

○ community college

○ college/university

○ technical or trade school

○ graduate school

○ law school

○ medical school

○ Other…

What is the main way you learned about that career? *

○ my parent/grandparents

○ sister or brother

○ other family members (like an aunt or uncle)

○ guidance counselor at York Early College Academy

○ teacher at York Early College Academy

○ classes at York Early College Academy

○ television

○ internet/social media

○ friend

○ book

○ Other…

After section 3   Continue to next section   ▼

Section 4 of 4

Familial Support Experience   ⌄   ⋮

My Familial Support Experience: To what extent do our 9th grade students have access to familial capital as it relates to college and career goals? In this section, please tell us about your experiences at home. There are no right or wrong answers.

∷∷

 I am taking important steps now to work towards my career goals. *

○ totally true

○ mostly true

○ somewhat true

○ mostly untrue

○ totally untrue

My family believes I can succeed in what I want to do *

○ totally true

○ mostly true

○ somewhat true

○ mostly untrue

○ totally untrue

The adults I interact with at home and in my community believe that I can be successful. *

○ totally true

○ mostly true

○ somewhat true

○ mostly untrue

○ totally untrue

At home, my family talks about college and planning for the future. *

○ frequently

○ often

○ sometimes

○ rarely

○ never

My family talks to me one-on-one about college and planning for the future. *

○ frequently

○ often

○ sometimes

○ rarely

○ never

I believe my family thinks I will graduate from high school. *

○ totally true

○ mostly true

○ somewhat true

○ mostly untrue

○ totally untrue

Which family members talk to me about college and careers at home? Describe how *

Long answer text

My family creates opportunities for me to find out about college and career opportunities. *

○ totally true

○ mostly true

○ somewhat true

○ mostly untrue

○ totally untrue

My family knows a lot about what you need to do to be successful in the future. *

○ totally true

○ mostly true

○ somewhat true

○ mostly untrue

○ totally untrue

Is there someone at home who really helps you prepare for the future? *

○ Yes

○ No

If yes, who is that person? Describe your relationship with them. *

Long answer text

INDIVIDUAL FOCUS GROUP QUESTION

1. Who would you prefer to get most of your college knowledge from? Why?

2. Where do you get most of your knowledge about college?

3. What interests you most about college?

4. How can YECA support you and your family to prepare you for the college experience better?

5. Describe how prepared you feel for your family to help you research colleges and assist you with the college application process.

6. What information would your family need to better assist you in successfully applying to the college of your dreams?

7. What goals (objective means to plan) and aspirations (a desire to achieve something) do you have for your future as a college student? Have you been distracted from your goals and aspirations? What or who kept you focused on your college goals and aspirations?

8. Describe your family dynamics and how their expectations have helped you set your college goals and aspirations.

9. What social community institutions are you a member of (i.e., church, mosque, community organization, local sports team, etc.), and how have they impacted your college goals and aspirations?

10. What beliefs, values, or expectations do you share with your family and the communities you belong to?

11. Describe any crucial relationships you have built with non-related adults or peers at home, your current high school, and your community and how these relationships impact your plans for college.

12. Is there any other important information you want to share?

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