

INSIGHTS

Thomas Kelly High School, a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood school on the southwest side of Chicago, examined its class of 2013 college enrollment data and found:

Students who were qualified to attend somewhat selective colleges were unlikely to enroll in a school that matched their qualifications. Many students qualified for four-year colleges in Illinois, but only 18 percent were going to a 4-year school, and 52 percent weren't enrolling in college at all.

Working with the University of Chicago's Network for College Success and using college enrollment data reports as a guide, the school's postsecondary leadership team (PLT) asked probing questions: were students not applying to four-year schools, deciding not to enroll in them, or some combination of both? Kelly's PLT then analyzed data on the quality of students' college applications and match between students' qualifications and college choices.

STRATEGIES

The PLT at Kelly targeted students whose grades and ACT scores made them eligible for somewhat selective four-year colleges for one-on-one conversations about college choice. In the course of those conversations, the team identified common barriers and began to outline strategies for addressing them:

Financial aid was the source of a great deal of anxiety and confusion. Kelly's PLT is now beginning conversations about financial aid much earlier, so that students and families can grow more familiar with process of applying for financial aid and gain a deeper understanding of their options.

Many students thought they should only pursue a four-year degree if they had definitively chosen a career path. Kelly staff are now actively working to help students understand that, while course sequencing and major selection are important, they are not prerequisites for applying.

Many students qualified for four-year colleges had ACT scores near the lower threshold of those schools' application eligibility cut-offs. Kelly is now flagging those students to make sure they are exposed to more "alternative admissions" and test-optional schools where test scores are less likely to be barriers to admission or receiving financial aid.



SCHOOL OVERVIEW THOMAS KELLY HIGH SCHOOL

School Type	Neighborhood
School Enrollment	2,188
Low Income	95%
African American	3%
Hispanic or Latino	80%
Diverse Learners	14%

Source: Chicago Public Schools. 1/7/2016 at: http://cps.edu/Schools/Find_a_school/Pages/findaschool.aspx

RESULTS

The 2013-14 school year was the first time all 579 of Kelly High's graduating seniors applied to at least one college. By 2014-15, 100 percent of seniors applied to three or more schools, and 80 percent of those applications were to colleges that matched students' qualifications. All of Kelly's high-achieving students applied to at least one match college.

For more information about Kelly High School's postsecondary team, contact: Aurora Flores Garcia, College & Career Coach | afloresgarc@cps.edu