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Network**

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NCAN Benchmarking
Spotlight:

I Know I Can

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“Dream Big. Work Hard. We’ll Help.”

Organization Overview

Introduction

In the mid-1980s, a small cadre of Columbus, Ohio leaders concerned about postsecondary opportunities for the city’s public school students founded I Know I Can (IKIC) with the mission “...to inspire, enable and support Columbus City Schools (CCS) students to pursue and complete a college education.” The founders established an endowment (which reached \$1 million a year later) to support scholarships in perpetuity. Several years later IKIC began providing financial aid assistance and awarding scholarships to CCS seniors. In the early 1990s, IKIC expanded its services to provide an introduction to college for 2nd graders through the development and delivery of a picture book titled *I Know I Can*. This made IKIC one of the first organizations nationwide to nurture the college aspirations of students at a young age.

Today, IKIC provides college awareness activities, advising, and application assistance to over 25,000 middle and high school students (11,000 6th-8th graders and 14,000 9th-12th graders) who attend CCS’ 20 high schools and 28 middle schools. In addition, more than 1,000 CCS graduates receive postsecondary retention support annually. Over 80 percent of the graduating seniors who receive IKIC’s services three or more times enroll in college directly from high school, compared with 42 percent of all CCS graduating seniors. IKIC awards over 400 graduates each year with a \$1,200 last dollar scholarship, and 60 percent of these students complete college degrees within six years compared with 11 percent of low-income students nationally.

Profile of Students Served

- 79% low-income
- 51% male
- 49% female
- 56% African American
- 1% American Indian
- 3% Asian American
- 9% Hispanic
- 26% White

IKIC is a strongly values-driven organization. Its work is guided by four core tenets:

- **Student-centered:** Grounding all programs, resources, and decisions in a determination of what is best for students and meets their needs.
- **Opportunity:** A commitment to raising expectations and removing barriers for students and their families.
- **Achievement:** A focus on academic advancement, nurturing early awareness of and desire to pursue college studies, and attainment of life skills such as engagement in civic activities.
- **Responsibility:** A commitment to providing world-class services to students and families, collaborating with key community partners, and being a leader in college access and success programming.

IKIC's growth and achievements are due in large part to the city-wide, cross-sector support it garners from volunteers and individual donors, local foundations and corporations, nearby higher education institutions, and, especially, its strong relationship with the Columbus City Schools. All sectors share in and support IKIC's deep commitment to ensuring that the city's youth receive whatever support they need to successfully pursue a college education.

Direct Services for Students

IKIC offers CCS students a continuum of college access and success services that begins with early awareness activities in second grade, intensifies in middle school, and ends with college completion.

Elementary School

Right to Read, the second-grade activity, emphasizes the development of reading habits and college aspirations. During a week in May, over 100 community volunteers visit CCS elementary schools to read a children's book to students to encourage them to begin dreaming about attending college. Readers include local celebrities like stars of the NHL's Columbus Blue Jackets and The Ohio State University's football team. The book, *I Know I Can*, is used by school districts nationwide and comes in a bilingual Spanish/English edition. Every second grader receives a copy of the book to bring home. Volunteers also share their college experiences with students and discuss the need for working hard in school to make their college dreams come true.

Middle School

IKIC offers two programs for students starting in 6th grade in 28 of the CCS middle schools.

Blueprint:College is a series of three early evening college and career workshops for parents and students. Students engage in hands-on activities to help them understand the connection between how much money their lifestyle aspirations will cost and what people with different education levels can expect to earn. Parental sessions focus on college affordability and creating a college-going culture within the family. Parents also receive help creating an account on Naviance, an online college and career readiness platform for CCS students and families. This account allows parents to work with their child on making decisions about high school courses, colleges, and careers. To make it easier for parents to participate in the sessions, IKIC provides food, transportation, and child care at no cost to participants. Recent college graduates join families for supper to share their experiences and answer questions about getting ready for college. Approximately 1,200 families attend Blueprint:College each year.

IKIC's in-classroom early awareness facilitations focus on developing students' knowledge of what they have to do to get ready for college. With IKIC support, students create personal profiles on the Naviance platform and complete an online curriculum designed to help them discover their strengths and learning styles, connect their interests with careers and college majors, and set future goals. Students update their profiles as they transition to and through high school and use the platform to keep track of their progress toward completing the steps involved in planning and applying for college. IKIC also supports Real Money, an interactive program that engages 8th graders in learning how to make lifestyle and budget choices they need to consider as they make decisions about their high school program and postsecondary education.

High School

IKIC college advisors work full-time four days a week in each of the city's public high schools, where they work collaboratively with school counselors to coordinate wraparound college planning services (Attachment A). Besides services tailored to individual school needs and interests, IKIC offers in-class Blueprint:College sessions, support for completing the Naviance curriculum, college advising, and FAFSA workshops (Attachment B). IKIC advisors provide eight workshops for 9th graders, seven for 10th and 11th graders, and five for 12th graders. Twelfth graders also meet regularly with advisors for one-on-one college application assistance. The in-classroom sessions take place during history or English classes, ensuring that every student receives grade-appropriate college and career planning information.

Blueprint:College workshops are offered to families of 9th-11th graders, engaging them in the college planning process early. These workshops cover the specific steps students need to take to prepare for college, which factors to consider in building a college list, and resources for managing college costs. The high school Blueprint:College program covers similar topics and reinforces what the Naviance curriculum covers. Ninth graders create online personal profiles if they did not do so in middle school so that they can document their progress. IKIC advisors monitor these profiles to ensure that students are meeting college readiness milestones. Students who are falling off track are prioritized for extra support.

College advisors provide students with one-on-one college and career advising, organize campus visits, and assist students with developing college lists, registering for admission tests, and identifying scholarships. They also coach students through the process of completing applications, understanding the differences between financial aid award packages, and figuring out the net price of each college. In addition to one-on-one advising sessions, IKIC offers group advising sessions to help students understand the results of the college and career assessments they complete as part of the

Naviance curriculum. To ensure that 12th graders who indicated they were planning to enroll in college actually do so, advisors also assist students over the summer after graduation with the steps they need to complete in order to matriculate. Students also can participate in a summer program prior to their college orientation designed to give them a sense of what the campus experience will be like. This program is run by IKIC's retention staff.

FAFSA workshops involve staff and volunteers helping families complete and submit the FAFSA. IKIC offers approximately 32 workshops throughout the school year, beginning in October and running through June.

Financial Assistance with College Costs

IKIC has provided thousands of students financial assistance with college costs from its endowment, now at \$32.5 million. IKIC offer three types of aid:

- **College admission exam and college application fee waivers:** Pell Grant-eligible students can receive fee waivers or payment for as many as three college applications and one entrance exam.
- **I Know I Can Grants:** These are worth up to \$1,200 a year for enrolled college students, renewable for up to four years. On average 900 students receive these grants annually, including 400 first-year college students. To be eligible for the IKIC Grant, a student must be a CCS graduate, attend college full-time, receive a Pell Grant, and have a 2.25 GPA in high school and a 2.0 GPA in college.
- **Founders' Scholarships:** Ten four-year Founders' Scholarships worth up to \$10,000 a year are awarded annually to CCS graduates attending a four-year college full-time. To be eligible for a Founders' Scholarship, students must have a 3.0 high school GPA, pass the Ohio Graduation Test, and have a 93-percent or higher attendance rate in high school. The Founders' Scholarship application requires two essays, letters of recommendation, and an extensive interview process once finalists have been identified.

IKIC also offers a matched college savings program for students in grades 8-12 called "Save Smart." With funding from the federal Assets for Independence (AFI) program, Save Smart helps qualified CCS 11th and 12th graders and high school graduates grow and leverage their college savings. A participant enrolls in the program by setting up an Individual Development Account (IDA) and is eligible to earn up to \$4 for every \$1 saved.

Over a minimum of six months, participants must save a total of \$500 for the academic year and complete a four-hour financial planning workshop. Once participants save the required amount, IKIC combines their savings with its \$1,200 grant and a federal match of \$1,000, which gives the student a total of \$2,700 to help offset college costs. In 2015, IKIC Save Smart participants deposited a total of \$45,000 into their IDAs, an amount that leveraged \$200,000 toward college.

College Retention Services

CCS graduates attending college anywhere in the U.S. are eligible for IKIC's retention services. However, IKIC grant recipients primarily use these services. Ohio College Guides work with IKIC to help students make the transition from high school graduation to college matriculation and graduation. Although Guides primarily work with students by phone, email, and texting, they periodically visit 16 Ohio college campuses enrolling significant numbers of CCS graduates to provide in-person advising. Guides help students clarify their college and career goals, resolve problems that are interfering with students' academic progress, and find ways around financial barriers that may prevent students from completing a degree.

In addition to having a College Guide provided by IKIC, students who receive an IKIC grant or scholarship are required to participate in IKIC's virtual mentoring program. Students must complete a mentorship profile before their IKIC award is disbursed. The program connects students with professionals in the greater Columbus area using an online platform called uMentor. The platform facilitates regular communication between mentors and students, automatically reminding them two to three times a month to contact each other, and suggests helpful topics for discussion. Students and mentors stay in touch via text, email, and phone during the academic year. Students also meet with their mentor in-person three times a year at special events organized by IKIC.

Staffing

IKIC has 33 full-time and two part-time staff members, 25 of whom directly serve students. In addition to the executive director, the leadership team comprises the directors of program development, finance and operations, college advising, college funding, and research, evaluation, and grants. Many staff members previously served as admissions and financial aid officers and have worked at IKIC for a long time. Because of their passion for IKIC's mission, they willingly work long hours and assume responsibilities beyond those of a nine-to-five job.

In addition to the paid staff, IKIC has 16 AmeriCorps Ohio College Guides working full-time. Twelve of the guides serve primarily 6th–10th graders, facilitating the Naviance workshops and meeting one-on-one with students. The other four work with college students, coordinating and implementing IKIC's distance and on-campus advising strategies.

Having paid, full-time advisors in each CCS high school is a recent development that has significantly expanded IKIC's capacity to serve students. Originally, IKIC relied on volunteers – primarily retired professionals – to advise students and assist with application processes. While this model was low-cost, students did not receive the ongoing support they needed to complete the steps involved in being admitted to college and securing financial aid because many of the volunteers left Columbus for the winter. Seven years ago, IKIC replaced the volunteers with paid advisors working one to two days a week in a school throughout the school year. Then, in 2015 through a

partnership with CCS, IKIC expanded its advising staff, making it possible to offer services four days a week in every high school. IKIC holds these paid advisors accountable for much higher expectations than it could for unpaid volunteers. Also, because the advisors are much younger than the volunteers and come from similar backgrounds as the students they serve, they relate easily to students and function as positive role models for them.

Tracking Student Progress

IKIC assesses student progress and success using NCAN's Common Measures for College Access and Success. Advisors track student data online using a platform called CollegePath, which was created by IKIC in partnership with Learning Circle Education Services. Advisors and College Guides record their day-to-day interactions with students, including the number of minutes spent with each student. Advisors and College Guides also record the Naviance lessons students that complete and their participation in workshops, individual and group advising sessions, campus visits, and special activities such as College Signing Day.

Under a data-sharing agreement with CCS, IKIC has full access to students' school records. CCS data are loaded into CollegePath and integrated with IKIC's college planning benchmark data. Combining CCS and IKIC data provides advisors with a holistic view of each student and allows them to identify and intervene with those who need special guidance to stay on track with finishing high school college-ready.

Advisors are introduced to the importance of tracking student data on the day they start working at IKIC. Advisors train in how to enter data and are required to build time into their daily schedules for doing so. At the end of each month, IKIC runs advising reports by grade level, comparing how many students received IKIC support in the current month with the number served in the same month in the previous year. These reports are shared with the entire staff, so people can see the results of their collective efforts, identify and analyze problem areas, and make needed programmatic adjustments. Advisors also can run their own reports. IKIC prepares similar year-end reports for each high school where advisors work (Attachment C).

Organizational Culture

IKIC's culture puts students and families first, backed by a strong emphasis on using data to inform decisions about how the organization can use its resources to support high-quality services that will result in strong student outcomes. IKIC leaders stress the importance of serving students and families in ways that are respectful and inclusive, honor their experiences, and build their capacity to achieve their goals. They also emphasize the importance of being consistent and reliable so as to build trust with stakeholders at all levels - students and their families, school district and building staff, community supporters, and funders.

Finances

IKIC has an annual budget of close to \$3.9 million, of which \$1.6 million goes directly to students in the form of grants, scholarships, fee waivers, and matched savings. Funding to support programs and services comes from diverse sources, including individuals (13.5 percent), foundations (12.4 percent), corporations (16.6 percent), contracted services (21.7 percent), book sales (1.5 percent), and IKIC's endowment (34.3 percent). The approximate per-student costs of IKIC's programs are \$60 in elementary and middle school, \$85 in high school, and \$125 in college.

Policies and Practices Contributing to Success

Data-Driven Decision Making

“Sticking with what works and keeping it going” is the mantra that drives decision making at IKIC. Staff members rely heavily on the student data they track to determine whether programs and services are producing positive outcomes. IKIC data indicate that students who receive 13 contacts or more in grades 9-12, including at least three one-on-one advising sessions, are more likely to enroll in college than students who receive fewer. Such “dosage data” contributed significantly to IKIC securing funding from CCS in 2015 to expand its high school advising services.

Using data also allows IKIC to quickly identify and end activities that are not having an impact on student outcomes and redirect resources to areas that make a positive difference. Examples of programs eliminated because data showed they had little or no impact include an ACT boot camp that IKIC ran for many years, weeklong summer enrichment programs for middle and high school students on college campuses, and college visits for 8th graders. Ending these programs freed up resources to invest in a “summer melt” texting program in 2015 that in one year's time reduced the number of high school graduates not enrolling in college from 30 percent to 16 percent.

Data play an important role in ensuring the accountability of IKIC staff for meeting organizational goals. Staff members each have a series of performance objectives for which they are accountable tailored to their job responsibilities and related to IKIC's goals (Attachment D). Staff members meet with their supervisor twice a month to review their progress toward achieving these performance objectives, identify any problems, and discuss how they might be resolved.

Data also play a critical role in IKIC's fundraising success. The staff uses data to show the Columbus community why CCS students need the services IKIC provides. Data also offer compelling evidence of how IKIC's programs are making a difference in the percentage of Columbus students enrolling in and completing college.

Continuum of Services, Grade 6 to Postsecondary Completion

IKIC's continuum of services begins in 6th grade and ends when students complete college. Consistent information provided at the time it is most relevant and "just in time" support are hallmarks of IKIC's work. These are also key to the doubled college enrollment rate of students who have three or more one-on-one advising sessions compared to CCS graduates in general. Pre-college services ensure that students and families have information about the steps involved with preparing and planning for college. Services for college students encompass financial support, navigational coaching, and online mentoring. Early in middle school, the focus is on creating the belief within each student that they not only can go to college but can succeed once they get there. The foundation for this work is actually laid in 2nd grade when IKIC introduces the idea of going to college through its book that every CCS student receives.

Engaging students and their families in the Blueprint:College workshop series from 6th through 11th grade is another feature of IKIC's continuum. The workshops build families' knowledge of the academic preparation needed for college and what students should do at each grade level to get ready. They also provide families with critical information about financial aid and how to make college costs manageable. IKIC's data offer evidence of the effectiveness of these early awareness activities, showing annually that students whose parents participate in Blueprint workshops complete many more milestones along the path to college than students whose parents do not attend.

For 11th and 12th graders, the emphasis shifts from workshops to personalized advice and support with navigating the college exploration, selection, and application processes. Students describe how important they find having a knowledgeable advisor who plays an active role in their college planning process and who reminds them of deadlines and missing documents they need to submit. Ultimately, students value having advisors who genuinely care about them, believe they can make it to college, and stand behind them when they need support.

College-level support involves academic advising, social emotional support, and help setting academic and career goals and determining the steps to achieve them. College Guides also provide critical assistance with resolving problems related to financial barriers to persisting in college. In addition, students receive support from their IKIC mentor. IKIC's mentorship program is designed to accommodate the busy schedules of both students and the professionals mentoring them.

Partnerships

Partnerships with the city's public school district and area colleges and universities contribute significantly to IKIC's successful student outcomes.

[Columbus City Schools \(CCS\)](#)

The IKIC founders intended the organization to focus exclusively on serving Columbus public school students, a mission to which the board and staff have held fast. People throughout the city view helping students get to and through college as a shared responsibility of IKIC and CCS. The superintendent of schools and IKIC's executive director maintain a close working relationship. CCS and IKIC jointly fund the high school advisors and the cost of Naviance for the school district. They also collaborate to organize special events such as the citywide College Signing Day for 12th graders each spring. On the school building level, CCS provides space for the IKIC advisors to meet with students, and IKIC advisors and school counselors co-lead workshops. In addition, the IKIC advisors take responsibility for implementing the Naviance career and college readiness curriculum, thereby fulfilling the state of Ohio's mandate that school districts provide career advising for all students. Finally, CCS provides IKIC access to student-level data, which is an essential factor in IKIC's effective use of data.

In May 2015, the Columbus Board of Education approved a memorandum of understanding for substantially expanding the partnership between CCS and IKIC. The expansion addressed IKIC's goals for helping more CCS students enroll in and complete postsecondary education. It also focused on Columbus' need for a well-educated workforce and the provision of opportunities for youth at-risk of being unemployed or underemployed after high school. Together, CCS and IKIC committed \$1.75 million each over four years to support the integration and coordination of IKIC and school-based resources and services related to college and career readiness.

To ensure the success of the partnership, a College and Career Readiness Expansion Advisory Committee was formed that comprises IKIC and CCS leadership, school counselors, and IKIC college advisors. The committee members worked together to design an implementation plan that maximized shared resources, services, and decision-making. This plan includes success indicators and annual benchmarks by which progress is tracked, monitored, and measured and a menu of services that provide intentional, one-on-one interventions to ensure students are on track for high school graduation (Attachment E).

[College and University Partners](#)

IKIC's partnerships with 16 Ohio colleges and universities where the IKIC College Guides work regularly vary from campus to campus. Enrollment management staffs work closely with IKIC to help students make successful transitions to campus. The institutions provide space where the College Guides can meet with students. Four of the partners underwrite the cost of a Founders' Scholarship worth up to \$10,000 a year, renewable for four years, while a fifth offers a full-tuition Founders' Scholarship. Several institutions give IKIC students priority in assigning faculty and staff mentors, and at least one institution offers students enhanced financial aid packages that make it possible for them to live on campus.

IKIC's executive director and senior director for college advising established the college partnerships through their work with the Higher Education Partnership Committee. This committee was formed by the CCS to develop expanded pathways to college for the

city's students and to work on challenges such as why so many CCS graduates place into remedial courses and how to better support students making the transition from high school to college. While this committee no longer exists, IKIC leaders have continued to engage college partners in both their pre-college and retention efforts.

College and university staff benefit from partnering with IKIC in several ways. They have increased the diversity of their student bodies, and the extra support provided by the IKIC College Guides has improved the retention rates of CCS graduates at the institutions where they enroll. Finally, some colleges view their commitment to supporting IKIC as an important way to fulfill their institutional mission. Two outstanding examples of such commitments are those made by Otterbein and Dennison Universities, which have pledged five and 20 four-year scholarships for CCS graduates, respectively, through agreements with IKIC.

Leveraging Naviance Resources

Leveraging the comprehensive college and career readiness resources available on the Naviance platform is another factor contributing to IKIC's high college enrollment rates. IKIC advisors introduce students to Naviance starting in 6th grade and support students with using the resources on the Naviance platform. IKIC advisors work closely with school counselors to implement the Naviance curriculum, which consists of a total of 105 lessons for grades 6-12 focusing on success skills, college and career planning, and financial literacy. They also help students use the program's tools to assess their learning styles, career interests, and readiness for college. Leveraging what Naviance offers means that IKIC has not had to develop its own pre-college curriculum and pedagogy and instead can devote its resources to enabling students to take full advantage of the rich resources Naviance offers.

Replication

According to board members, staff, and partners, the most important factors in replicating the IKIC model are the strategic use of data, strong partnerships, and great leadership. Strategic use of data is imperative to making the case for the need for an IKIC-type program and ensuring that the services offered are responsive to student and community needs. Strong partnerships with public school districts and higher education institutions are equally critical. Such partnerships need to involve commitments both from people at the top who can make replicating the model an institutional priority and on-the-ground staff who have responsibility for implementation.

Finally, replication efforts need to be led by well-respected, dynamic leaders who can inspire others in the local community to get on board and contribute the necessary financial support to launch the model. Those leading such efforts need to be cognizant of the community's political environment and able to operate successfully within it. They also need to be skillful collaborators and willing to share credit broadly. Finally, engaging corporate philanthropic leaders and prominent elected officials as partners and champions is critically important.

Conclusion

IKIC's emphasis on being a values-driven organization is clearly reflected in the high college enrollment and completion rates of its students. The priority placed on helping students develop personal profiles on the Naviance platform and closely monitoring their progress with completing the steps in their college plan exemplifies the way in which IKIC is student-centered. The provision of fee waivers, renewable scholarships, and matched savings reflects its commitment to ensuring students have affordable college opportunities regardless of their families' financial resources. Taking responsibility for providing students and families with world-class services is seen in IKIC's use of data to continually assess the effectiveness of its programs.

Both a continuum of services from elementary school through college completion and a far-reaching partnership with the Columbus City Schools also contribute significantly to IKIC's success. Its service continuum assures that students and families have the information and assistance they need – when they need it – to move along the path to a college degree.

The partnership with the CCS has enabled IKIC to scale its services to reach and support every high school student in the district. Providing a total of 27 workshops during the school day over four years means that all students have repeated exposure to key concepts and steps involved in college and career planning. Underwriting the cost of Naviance for the school system allows IKIC full use of the extensive resources this program delivers. And, perhaps most important, the access to student record data that CCS provides gives IKIC staff a full picture of students' progress toward meeting college readiness standards, enabling staff to identify those students who are falling behind and help them get back on track before it's too late.

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List of Attachments

- Attachment A: Menu of Services
- Attachment B: College/Career Advising Curriculum
- Attachment C: Sample High School College and Career Readiness Report
- Attachment D: College Advising Manager Performance Objectives
- Attachment E: CCS/IKIC Agreement re: In-School Services