



This case study is part of an eight-part series under APLU's Guided Pathways for 4-Year Institutions model.

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# 4-Year Guided Pathways Case Study: Pathway Partnerships - ACES

## Introduction

The Achieving Collegiate Excellence and Success (ACES) program provides front-line service and macro-level policy work to promote equity in the lives of nearly 3000 (and counting) students in Montgomery County Maryland. Endeavoring to build a world in which every child has a real chance to meet his or her true potential ACES promotes equity by providing what each student needs to realize this potential. ACES academic coaches work to advance issues, policies and programs; while working hand-in-hand with students and their families as ACES moves forward with the intent to address racial injustices in higher education through strategic partnerships.

According to a National Center for Education Statistics (2008) study 11% of low-income community college students transferred to a 4-year institution compared to 48% of their higher-income peers. In addition, the rates of transfer to 4-year institutions for African American, Latino, low-income, and first-generation community college students are significantly lower than the general population (Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach; 2005). Engle and Tinto's (2008) study on College Success For Low-Income & First-Generation Students provides recommendations on how colleges can promote and foster college access and success. ACES' mission and founding principles are deeply tied to implementing these recommendations.

## Description of Strategy

ACES offer culturally inclusive academic coaching strategies and interventions to ensure students at every stage of the partnership program (i.e., high school, Community College, and 4-year university) can easily transition from one system to the next to ensure a supportive pathway to a baccalaureate degree.

Academic Coaches work to identify stop gaps in public education by providing a seamless pathway of support that begins in high school, continues through community college, and to the attainment of a bachelor's degree to ensure that college completion is possible. The outcomes include (1) increase in college readiness, (2) college applications, and (3) graduation among students enrolled in ACES who can then join the region's workforce and contribute back to the local economy.

Some interventions used include:

- Individualized coaching
- College application and financial aid support

## Description of Strategy (cont.)

- Transition support first to community college, then to a four-year institution, and, finally, into a career
- Leadership development programming and opportunities
- Career readiness training and skills

## Relation to the Model

Montgomery County's response to help close achievement gaps was the Achieving Collegiate Excellence and Success (ACES) program. ACES is a collaborative pathway program from Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) to Montgomery College, and eventually to the Universities at Shady Grove (USG)—a consortium of nine Maryland public universities on one campus in Montgomery County.

Through on-ramps recruitment, entry, progress, completion, and transition, ACES provide students who typically face barriers to higher education with access to an affordable, seamless pathway to a bachelor's degree, offering individualized, student-centered support every step of the way. ACES provide front-line service and macro-level policy work to promote equity in the lives of nearly 3,000 (and counting) students in Montgomery County. At every stage of the model, ACES targets students who are first-generation, low-income, underrepresented, wards of the state, English language learners, and who have an IEP or 504 plan. Furthermore, ACES provide academic coaching, individualized academic and student support, and interventions to aid in increasing college enrollment and completion, especially among underrepresented student groups.

At every stage of the model, ACES mirror's its representation by providing students with personalized advisement and a wide array of programming to help ensure they are well-equipped pre-, mid-, and post- their postsecondary plans. This includes monthly academic success workshops, one-on-one academic planning, career inventories, college trips, math and English remediation courses, and job shadowing opportunities. In addition, a series of summer programs are offered every year, starting with Mission Possible the summer before entering the 11th grade and culminating with Make Your Move for incoming first-year Montgomery College students. Each summer program emphasizes a critical element of collegiate success: college preparation, career exploration, and college transition.

ACES is built around a one-stop case management model for student services and academic support and foster a holistic approach to help students matriculate to, persist through, and graduate with a baccalaureate degree. ACES academic coaches are available at each step of the pathway to provide one-on-one intrusive support in academic planning, career exploration, leadership development, social skill building, financial aid and scholarship guidance, as well as overall mentorship.