

Evaluating the methods and effectiveness of community-based organizations in supporting economically marginalized students and students of color through college

Individual Program Report for Determined to Succeed

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STUDY OVERVIEW

Purpose

Gaining access to college does not guarantee a college degree, particularly for economically marginalized students and students of color. In fact, despite rising *acceptance* rates, college *completion* rates have remained widely disparate across racial and economic groups, with postsecondary institutions graduating fewer than half of their Hispanic and Black students and less than a fifth of their economically marginalized students within six years. Programming at postsecondary institutions has done little to lessen these gaps.

In reaction to the insufficient support postsecondary institutions have provided to economically marginalized students and students of color, a number of community-based organizations (CBOs) created college success programs (CSPs) to help students persist to degree. Based on CBO impact data, many CSPs have successfully supported students through college. However, no systematic investigations across programs have been conducted. As a result, despite the fact that these programs serve tens of thousands of students annually, it is unknown what programming CSPs provide and how this programming enables students to successfully navigate postsecondary institutions that often discourage their completion. Without this information, scholars, educators, and policymakers have not had an opportunity to learn how CSPs support underserved students through college or to apply those lessons broadly.

The current study, which was funded by The Spencer Foundation (#201900205), aimed to address this gap by answering the following questions: (1) What do CSPs *do* to support student degree attainment? (2) How is the support from CSPs perceived by students and how does that support differ/interact with postsecondary programming? (3) How do students understand the impact of CSPs on their postsecondary success?

Methods

The aforementioned questions were explored in a mixed-methods study of 11 CSPs from across the nation, including Determined to Succeed (DTS). To ensure a broad spectrum of CSPs were represented, programs had to meet three inclusion criteria, including that they: were community-based (i.e., not associated with a particular school/college); worked primarily with economically marginalized and/or students of color; and offered programming intended to support students through college.

Once DTS agreed to participate, three forms of data were collected: observational, survey, and interview. Observational data was collected during the site visit Dr. Case conducted in December 2019. During this visit, Dr. Case interviewed five DTS staff members to learn more about the history, mission, structure, and outcomes of the program. The DTS staff members who were interviewed included Mimi (Executive Director), Jessica (Co-Executive Director), Stephanie (College Access and Success Counselor), Carmen (Health and Wellness Director), and Emmanuel (Math, Science, and Testing Specialist). Survey and interview data were also collected from students to gather demographic information regarding students served, as well as student experiences with the program. Thirty-four current or former students completed the student survey and 10 of these students also participated in follow-up interviews.

FINDINGS¹

DTS Student Characteristics

More than 60% of the 34 students who responded to the survey were female and approximately 65% identified as Latinx or Hispanic, with the remaining students identifying as Black or African American (6%), American Indian, Alaska Native, First Nations, or Indigenous (6%), Asian or Asian American (3%), and Middle Eastern or North African (3%). Over 96% of students who responded to questions about family education history identified as first-generation college students. Regarding their educational status, 85.3% of respondents were currently enrolled in a college or university, 93.1% of whom were pursuing 4-year degrees. Of these students, 37% were in their first-year of college, 11.1% were in their second year, 3.7% were in their third year, and 37.0% were in their fourth year. Regarding their educational aspirations, 22.2% aspired to earn a 4-year degree, 48.1% aspired to earn a master's degree, and 19.3% aspired to earn a doctoral or professional degree. 96.3% of these students indicated they believed it was either "somewhat" or "very" likely they would achieve their educational aspirations.

The cultural demographics of students who were interviewed were comparable to the survey respondent demographics. Of the 10 interviewed students, 6 were female and 4 were male. Seven identified as Latinx or Hispanic, 2 as Black or African American, and 1 as American Indian, Alaska Native, First Nations, or Indigenous. Nine of the students identified as first-generation college students.

Program Mission/Priorities

Staff perspective. The website states DTS is a "college access and success program for highly motivated, low income, first generation students that takes a unique and impactful 'whole child' approach that allows students to discover they have the tenacity to achieve their academic goals of high school and college graduation and set themselves on the path to fulfilling futures." The staff reiterated this mission during the interviews, highlighting that DTS prioritizes holistic well-being while also addressing knowledge inequities among low SES and first-generation college students that are created by public school systems. In addressing these holistic needs, DTS staff described a mission of supporting students and their families so they are able to navigate college transitions not only academically but financially and personally as well. Staff members noted that these services are provided in a way that is mindful of cultural dynamics and norms amongst students and families.

Student perspective. Several of the interviewed students echoed and added to the program mission and priorities articulated by staff members. Virtually all of the students explicitly described DTS as intentionally serving "low-income students" and "first-generation college students." The students also reinforced the program's holistic emphasis. For example, although virtually all of the students stated that DTS is designed to help students "attend and finish college," almost all of the students also described DTS as being "much more" than that. The "more" that students named included "opening doors...in life generally," helping students get "jobs," serving as "a second set of parents," and "literally help[ing] you get whatever you need."

¹ Note that only data pertaining to DTS are included in this report. An additional report detailing the overall findings of the full study will be made available to the organization as well.

DTS Student Challenges & Use of Check-Ins

On the survey, students were asked about the challenges they do (or did) face in college from a list of pre-set options including time management, financial issues, homesickness, depression, health issues, social issues, pressure of studying, and housing problems. Students were also given space to list other challenges they face. In addition, students were also asked about their use of the DTS weekly check-ins to discuss the above challenges.

Only one student indicated they experienced no challenges in college; the remaining students endorsed experiencing an average of three of the listed options. Table 1 shows the proportion of students who endorsed each of the listed challenges, the proportion of respondents who indicated they used their weekly check-ins to discuss each challenge, and the alignment between those two proportions. Positive numbers in the difference column indicate students discussed the issue in their check-ins at rates that *exceeded* reports of experiencing the issue; negative numbers indicate students discussed the challenge at rates that were *less than* reports of experiencing the issue. These differences may indicate that students were not using their weekly check-ins to discuss challenges around social and, especially, financial issues despite experiencing them. Further, differences also indicate students were checking in about health issues and especially homesickness and pressures of studying at rates that exceed their actual experiencing of those challenges.

Table 1: Use of check-ins and alignment with challenges.

Challenge	Proportion of students affected by challenge	Proportion of students that discussed the challenge during weekly check-ins	Difference between % students who discussed challenge and % students affected by challenge
Time management	58.8%	58.8%	0%
Financial issues	32.4%	8.8%	-23.6%
Homesickness	20.6%	38.2%	+17.6%
Depression	26.5%	26.5%	0%
Health Issues	20.6%	23.5%	+2.9%
Social Issues	26.5%	20.6%	-5.9%
Pressure of studying	35.3%	52.9%	+17.6
Housing Problems	11.8%	23.9%	+12.1%

On the survey students were also asked “in what ways have (or did) check-ins positively benefit your college experiences?” (see Appendix A for full survey responses). Most of the responses emphasized how the check-ins provided a source of support and, through that support, comfort. One student said “I know there is someone back at home who supports the things I do throughout college and know that if I need the extra support there is someone there to help me out.” Others claimed the check-ins “lets me know that I have someone on my side even when things get tough,” and “made me feel less alone during times when I have felt alone.” Students also emphasized the check-ins allowed them to get an “outside

perspective” on the situations from an “adult,” which they found to be helpful: “When you’re in college you kind of get immersed in everything, and hearing from someone who has known you for years and understands you can help you in ways that resources here in college might not be able to.” Finally, students described how the check-ins normalized “[asking] for help” and “kept me in line academically.”

Program Strengths

Staff perspective. Several themes emerged from interviews regarding staff perspectives of program strengths. These themes included (1) DTS’s holistic approach, (2) DTS staff’s relationships with students, and (3) family engagement.

Holistic approach. Multiple staff members noted that it is DTS’s holistic approach that enables them to so effectively support students. In particular, staff members named the “*prioritization of health and mental health above academic performance*” as being a key value of the program. Several of the staff members suggested that it was this holistic focus that allowed DTS to both “*reduce stigma*” around asking for help overall and foster in students a sense of “*self-efficacy and self-advocacy*.”

Staff relationships with students. All of the interviewed staff members named their relationships with students as foundational to DTS’s success. As one staff member noted, “*students trust the staff and the program*.” Some of the staff members attributed this trust to the fact that the staff works to develop a “*cultural understanding of their students*,” which enables them to be “*flexible*” in how they respond to students’ “*individual needs*” and use a “*scaffolding approach*” when they are guiding students. Another staff member plainly stated that all DTS staff are “*committed to the students*.”

Family engagement. Many of the staff members also noted DTS’s efforts to engage caregivers and families as a core program strength. Staff members described serving as “*a resource for parents*” and “*fostering family understanding of the college process*” so that families “*feel more prepared*” to actively support their children to and through college. As a result of the multiple efforts DTS makes to establish relationships with parents and foster the “*bond between parent and child*,” DTS staff described receiving “*a strong sense of trust from parents*.”

Student perspective. On the survey, students were asked whether there were any particular parts of DTS programming in high school that were especially helpful in college. The responses were varied but unanimously positive (see Appendix A). The majority of the responses named some aspects of the academic programming provided by DTS, including ACT/SAT prep, tutors, study halls, and Saturday writing workshops. The bulk of the responses also cited the various activities that supported their college awareness and applications, including college workshops, college campus tours, and Bridge to College. However, the overarching sense in these responses was captured by one student who stated “*Everything. This program is extremely helpful in every aspect of life. Before coming to college we did a one week college workshop. Everything that I was grappling with in regards to college was covered. From academic to economic problems and even social issues...This allowed me to learn and avoid problems in college. It made the transition from high school to college smooth and extremely pleasant*.”

In addition to the strengths identified on the surveys, students spoke at length about a range of program strengths during the interviews. These strengths primarily fell into three main areas: (1) relationships with staff, (2) individualized support from qualified staff, and the (3) program’s holistic focus.

Relationships with staff. Students spoke at length during the interviews about the quality and depth of their relationships with DTS staff and named these relationships as a core strength of the program. Multiple students mentioned the “genuine” relationships they had formed with DTS staff members, which enabled them to feel “connected” to the program. Many students also described these relationships as “safe,” “caring,” and “nonjudgmental,” which enabled them to reach out to DTS in both good and bad times: “if there was ever a problem you had with your parents or just family in general, you could always talk to them. So they were always there, with anything. It didn't even have to be a problem. It could be you just want to talk to them and they were like, ‘Yeah, you could come and talk to us’.” Similarly, another student shared: “I think one of its greatest strengths is...being able to form a genuine relationship with all those students in different ways. And that way when something happens and I need help, I don't feel like they're just doing their job; I feel like they're a friend or a mentor that genuinely wants to help me and see me do well.”

Individualized support from qualified staff. Perhaps because of the relationships developed between students and staff, many of the interviewed students noted that DTS provides individualized support from staff members who clearly “know what they're doing.” According to many of the students, this “one-on-one support” was based on student needs. For example, as one student mentioned, at one point she was “struggling academically” and DTS provided her with a tutor; another time she was having “back problems” and DTS connected her with an “acupuncturist.” In this example, the student also highlighted another identified strength of DTS, which was that the program went out of their way to “connect” students with other people and resources. What is more, several of the students noted that because of the relationships that exist between DTS staff and students, the staff are able to “know when to hold your hand and walk through things, and...when to step back when they know you can handle things on your own.”

Holistic focus. Students also described the holistic focus as a strength of DTS. As one student stated, “Determined to Succeed...[doesn't] just look at you academically, they look at you as a whole person.” The students suggested that because of this holistic focus, DTS has enabled them to make connections between their physical and mental health and their academic development. For example, one student described that DTS helped her realize that if she has “emotional stuff and physical stuff going on” it was also going to “reflect in [my] academics.” Students also attributed DTS's holistic focus to the program's openness to talking with students about their “life in general” and the program's dedication to connecting students with resources to address both academic and non-academic concerns: “[Carmen] makes it a point to be like ‘Yeah, if you need help, this is where you can get it...These are all the areas that you can help yourself and ask questions’.”

Program Areas for Improvement

Staff perspective. DTS staff noted three main areas for improvement: (1) funding/resources; (2) staffing; and (3) student programming.

Funding/resources. Like virtually all non-profits, many staff members described a need for more funding and, through that funding, more resources. As one staff member noted, it's been “hard to get grant money from larger foundations” in part because of the smaller cohort sizes that restrict the foundations that will consider funding the program. Because of funding restrictions, staff noted they did not have the budget to provide certain resources for students and families. Some of the resources that were noted as lacking included “transportation” that would enable students and families to participate in workshops or other events, “food” so that students and families would have access to

healthy food options as well as vitamins and supplements that could support their development, and “space” so that students have safe and appropriate places to exercise and study.

Staffing. Also similar to many community-based programs, DTS staff expressed a need for “more staff” overall as well as a more streamlined process to on-board new staff so they can quickly adapt to the “fast pace of the organization” and step into new roles “with as much ease as possible.”

Student programming. Finally, DTS staff members articulated several interrelated areas of growth related to student programming. These areas of growth included having “more time with kids to properly support them all and give them each their individually-catered support,” finding “more effective ways to deal with and reach out to more difficult kids who are at risk for dropping out of the program,” “establishing a sense of community for students once they’re on their different college campuses to provide a sense of support and solidarity,” providing additional “lessons and programming in career readiness,” and developing a “case note system” that would allow staff members to better track student progress and outcomes.

Student perspectives. Alongside the named program strengths, students also described some areas for improvement both on the survey and in the interviews. On the survey some students responded to the question “what could DTS do (or have done) differently to better support you in college?” with suggestions such as ensuring DTS staff are knowledgeable about campus-specific resources and particular tracks within college (e.g., pre-med), ensuring students are not compared to one another and staff do not play favorites, and providing more financial support. However, the majority of students responded to the question with some version of “nothing” because DTS is “doing a great job.” In addition, two students mentioned that although DTS were “REALLY helpful in high school,” the program was less helpful “now [that I’m in] college.”

Program requirements. Several students provided suggestions for how the program requirements might be adjusted. For example, one student mentioned, “There were definitely some summer programs that could have been optional,” describing that the “zero tolerance policy on missing university camp without an extremely valid reason” was too “strict.”

Programming. The students also provided suggestions for programming they wish they would have been exposed to through DTS. Several students described a desire for more financial literacy programming. For example, one student stated DTS should teach “how to handle money-when you leave your parents...[learning] how to spend money took me a little while.” This sentiment was echoed by several other students. Relatedly, another student requested a workshop on “this is what a tax is, this is how to

make money, these are the forms you should expect to fill out.” Finally, one student mentioned a desire for more programming on “time management” and another mentioned a need for more programming to prepare them to be more “independent.”

Staff composition. Alongside students’ descriptions of the depth and genuineness of their relationships with DTS staff, students shared one critique related to staff in the student interviews. Two of the male students who were interviewed mentioned a need for more “male representation in their staff.” As one of these students noted, because the staff was all women when he was in the program, “a teenage boy like me couldn’t make the same jokes or have the same loose energy.”

Student demographics and connection. Several interviewed students also shared feedback about the student composition of the program and the relationships that were established between students. Regarding the student composition, one student mentioned, “It’s not something that needs to be addressed but I’d say it was majority Hispanic students as opposed to let’s say 15% to 20% of the students were black...I wish I saw more black faces I guess in the program.” Another student advocated for larger cohort sizes, saying “I feel like my cohort was really small...I just wish I had a bigger cohort because I know the cohort above me had more kids they could talk to or whatnot.”

Program Impact

Staff perspective. Staff shared data that clearly document the impact of the program: not only do all DTS students graduate from high school, but 93% of them also make the honor roll while in high school. What is more, 100% of DTS students enroll in college and 100% of the 2020 class of DTS was on track to graduate from college in 4 years.

Student perspective. Although the program-level data speaks to the effectiveness of DTS in supporting students to and through college, data from students provide nuance and depth to the impact of the program. On the survey (see Appendix A), students answered open-ended questions about what they learned from DTS in high school that affected their college experience. Many of their responses, some of which were in contrast to other students’ noted areas of improvement, stated DTS helped them appreciate hard work, develop important “time management” and “study skills,” and learn how to communicate effectively with others. Additionally, many students referenced that DTS provided them with “tools and knowledge of things that would likely come our way in college,” which helped students “navigate” college. For example, one student stated “[DTS] taught about potential uncomfortability that I may encounter [in college] like imposter syndrome, culture shock, homesickness, etc. and how to deal with or handle it. This has helped ground me [because] I know [it’s] a normal part of the college transition process so I don’t freak out and feel like I should drop out.” For several of the students, it became clear to them that “other students who did not have DTS...did not have a lot of knowledge on what to expect.” For these and other students, the implications of DTS extended beyond school. Several of the students on the survey shared that DTS helped them “gain confidence,” which allowed them to “become less fearful of participating and sharing my ideas” and to be “proactive in school and in life.”

Other students also mentioned how DTS helped them learn how “to cope with stress and controlling my emotions.” As a result, students seemed to hear the message from DTS that they are “capable of many things given the right worth ethic and support system.”

These same themes, as well as some others, were also captured in the student interviews. In particular, students described the impact of DTS as focusing on several interrelated areas: (1) educational outcomes, (2) college experiences, (3) sense of self, (4) financial barriers, and (5) occupational outcomes.

Impact on educational outcomes. With only one exception, all of the interviewed students shared they did not believe they would have attained their current level of education, or would not have been at the postsecondary institution they were attending, without DTS. As one student plainly stated, “if they hadn't shown up to my elementary school to outreach I'd probably be working a minimum wage job at home, just helping my mom pay rent.” Another echoed this sentiment, stating “I'm not sure what I would be doing if I didn't get early support [from DTS]...Most of those students that I know from high school didn't pursue higher education.”

Several students tied the influence of DTS on their educational outcomes to their status as “first-generation” college students. For example, one student noted, “I'm the first one in my family to go to college from my mom's side and then I'm the oldest out of three. So it's like I'm literally like the first one...[DTS] were very helpful when it came to figuring out the whole college process, because it was such a scary thing to my parents, and me as I was just a first-generation student.” Another student shared, “both of my parents are immigrants so I always knew I wanted to go to college [and that it] could be hard to go to college...But DTS, when I joined the program, a lot of those problems were shut down. So they just opened a lot of doors for me.”

Other students felt certain they would be pursuing higher education somewhere, but named DTS as a primary reason why they enrolled where they did: “I think that the biggest thing is that if I wasn't for DTS, I don't think I'd be going to the school I'm at right now...I think my applicant profile was definitely benefited by doing a number of summer activities. Some of that I would have done regardless, because some of it was sports and music, which I would have done anyway, but other things like tutoring and grade assistance. I think I would have gotten similar grades, but I...I was on the cusp for several classes and just that added reassurance and effort put me over the edge.” Similarly, another student shared “I don't think the likelihood of me being at [a competitive school] would have been as high if I didn't have DTS...DTS just opened up my eyes to know I could go out of state and...apply to [those] schools also.”

Impact on college experience. For many of the students, DTS not only impacted whether they were in college and where they went to college but also their experience while they were in college. Much of this influence was because the students felt well-prepared for college overall: *“I think they reiterated a lot that it was going to be a really difficult transition [to college]. So before we came to college [I knew] that it's okay for it to be difficult, especially for us if we're going to go really far away from home.”*

In addition, students cited particular ways that DTS prepared them for college. One student talked specifically about the writing preparation DTS provided: *“They worked with me every Saturday to help my writing get better. I kind of hated it at that time...but now looking back, I think that's what really helped me, because...a lot of the time [in college] it's a lot of papers, a lot of writing.”* Another student noted DTS helped them learn about time management and how to *“break [my assignments] down.”*

Impact on sense of self. Students also spoke at length about the ways DTS had shaped how they thought about themselves and the implications of those changed self-perceptions. Several students mentioned that DTS taught them that they can *“survive on my own,”* which enabled them to feel capable of taking risks and going to college far from home. For example, one student said they learned *“I can meet new people on my own...I can stand up for myself and I don't necessarily need my parents to fight my battles for me. So I feel like [DTS] pushed me to see that, ‘Oh, I don't have to stay in [at home]’. I can go someplace. I can fend for myself.”* Another student said, *“It sounds corny but it's in their name, determined...[DTS has taught me to be] more tenacious and obviously determined, not giving up and even if something is hard, just getting back up and continuing to persevere.”*

Students also described how DTS taught them both that they had the right to *“advocate”* for themselves and also how to advocate for themselves. For example, one student said *“DTS as a whole contributed to me being more willing to speak my mind and do as I want and please, within reason, of course, because it gave me a platform and the opportunities to pursue these things and knowing firsthand, directly, that the reason that I'm there in the first place is because I'm speaking out and being who I am.”* Another student echoed this sentiment, applying it directly to education: *“with DTS, I...know that as a student, I have the right to ask questions and no question is considered stupid and so I feel like I'm extremely comfortable now telling my professors, ‘Hey, I don't understand the material’.”*

Impact on financial barriers. For many of the interviewed students, DTS also helped them overcome some of the financial barriers that could have affected their college enrollment and persistence. Some of this support came by way of scholarships that DTS staff encouraged students to apply for: *“Mimi made me...apply for this scholarship. I was like, ‘No, there's no way,’ [but] I got it!”* At other times, DTS staff were able to counsel students through academic difficulties. For example, one student said *“[one semester] I owed a lot of money and I was really thinking about going back home...if I didn't have DTS, I probably would have done that and maybe not continue with college.”* Another shared a story about a time when financial aid had not yet been distributed, which caused them to *“panic.”* As the student described, *“I called Mimi that day and...she explained it all to me...I feel like I probably would have fallen apart without them.”* Finally, DTS also directly addressed students' possible financial barriers, especially at the beginning of college with all of the unanticipated costs. As one student described, *“when I first entered freshman year, they really helped us out with the whole aspect of buying us the necessities for*

freshman year. Anything that we couldn't afford, they were able to help us.” Similarly, another student shared, “I feel like moving in [to college] would have been really difficult because I come from a low-income family, so thankfully DTS helps...us.”

Impact on occupational outcomes. In addition to supporting their personal development and educational outcomes, students also named DTS as a key factor in their occupational outcomes. For example, one student said, “The jobs that I have now are definitely...because of DTS, for sure.” In describing how DTS shaped their occupational preparation and outcomes, many students spoke about the internships that DTS helped them secure: “I think all my summer internships have been by way of DTS;” “Last year, Mimi also helped me get another internship...I didn't even know how she found out about this very loose connection [through someone's] friend's husband's wife, [but] the company...needed an intern and I applied and I got it.” Embedded in these narratives are the understanding that DTS would “provide me interview or job search help if I requested it at all.” From the perspective of some students, such support “kind of helps with equity through historic injustices which lead to these gaps in opportunity in the first place. [DTS] just definitely helps across the board.”

SUMMARY

DTS is an organization that aims to support the holistic development and educational access and success of first-generation college students from economically marginalized backgrounds. Based on data from staff members and students, the program is largely successful at doing so. Not only do programmatic and student data speak to the effectiveness of the program at supporting students to and through college but, in addition, the data also acknowledge the additional impacts the program has on students' sense of self and their occupational outcomes. Students largely attribute these impacts to their relationships with staff, the individualized support they receive from qualified staff, and the program's holistic focus. In addition, the students noted the positive impacts of DTS's weekly check-ins. Alongside these strengths, students and staff also identified areas for program improvement that largely aligned with one another.

Appendix A²

Student responses to open-ended survey items

Question: “What did you learn during DTS in high school that affects (or did affect) your day-to-day college experience?”

- *Communication. We communicate from day to day, people to people, online or face to face. It’s an important management function that is associated with managerial functions. It fills gaps from individuals to communities and allows those individuals to gain new information and understandings between them. Clear communication allows for a plethora of benefits and boosts productivity as well as the spirit of the community.*
- *Determined to Succeed was very helpful in giving us the tools and knowledge of things that would likely come our way in college. I think preparing yourself for the culture shock that comes with attending college and also having older students from the program share their experiences has been helpful. I personally loved the bridge to college program they put on, that runs with the help of the DTS college students. It showed me the tools that I would likely use to navigate day-to-day college like time management skills, course searches, drafting emails, and navigating resources universities offer.*
- *DTS gave me the opportunity to do programs I would not have heard about without them. Through these programs I developed my communication skills, gaining confidence in myself and becoming less fearful of participating and sharing my ideas.*
- *DTS made college appear way more intense than it actually is, at least in my opinion. This made it so that my academic experience in college is actually much smoother than it would have been had I not gone in with the expectation that it would be so hard.*
- *DTS taught me about the entire college process, including financial aid which helped me get into college in the first place. They taught about potential uncomfortabilities that I may encounter like imposter syndrome, culture shock, homesickness, etc. and how to deal with or handle it. This has helped ground me in that any of those things that I feel I know is a normal part of the college transition process so I don’t freak out and feel like I should drop out.*
- *DTS taught me that I am capable of many things given the right work ethic and support system. I always think about my time applying to colleges with the director up until the very last minute. Not only did she demand more from me to push towards success, but I realized the work she was putting in to support me as well to reach my goals, something I’m forever grateful for.*
- *How to apply to college and financial aid.*
- *How to set time aside to study and do homework. Also not be afraid of asking the teacher for help and go to office hours.*
- *How to write a proper email. Simple people skills in brand new environments. How to handshake properly. How to write a great essay.*
- *I learned multiple things that would be involved in college that all throughout high school I felt every student should know, but as I got to meet other students who did not have DTS they did not have a lot of knowledge on what to expect.*
- *I learned how to cope with stress and controlling my emotions. I was taught to control stress that was evoked from personal issues or academics. I understood to allow myself to experience the emotion for a bit and then become accepting of it to be able to overcome it.*

² Note: these data were entered by respondents and have not been edited for grammar or spelling

- I learned the importance of being proactive in school and in life. Whether it be asking teachers for help, asking question when they arise, and not being scared to ask for help which are all skill that are important in college where you have classes with 300+ students. In college it is important to reach out professor when you need help, attend office hours and overall being able to teach yourself the skills you need to succeed in your class.
- I learned valuable skills, such as what to do when I feel overwhelmed, stressed or homesick. I also learned what to do when I encounter hurtful comments. I also learned about imposter syndrome and how it is completely normal to feel as if you don't belong. All you have to do is remember that you deserve to be here.
- I learned what it was like to be immersed in a college setting through being involved in summer enrichment programs that took place on college campuses. I also attended DTS workshops that discussed what to expect in college.
- I was prepared for most challenges I faced during my first year of college.
- I'm the middle child of five siblings. My duty is to take care of my younger brothers and follow the steps of my older sisters. Everyone is always telling me to get good grades and be the best student. In high school, I would often catch myself sleep deprived and skipping meals. I got to a point where I was even losing my eyesight from all the pressure I was facing at home and in school. DTS helped me cope with my academic struggles as well as my emotional and mental health. I've learned how to cope with my struggles by journaling daily or as often as I can. I still have the journal that Mimi gave me during high school. It's a daily reminder that I will be okay because "everything will be okay in the end; if everything isn't okay, it's not the end."
- It took a while but I learned to ask for help if I ever did feel down. They really supported me after they realized my situation. I learn best if I talk with someone about a topic to clear up any confusion.
- Knowing to review and go over my notes, importance of working hard, and generally perspective on the importance of what I'm doing.
- Getting used to really going in on schoolwork through DTS has made it a habit, but honestly, it's hard to say. They were REALLY helpful in high school.
- Something I learned during DTS in high school is that creating networks with professors, advisors or peers is very important. This positively affected my college experience because I have a very close professional relationship with my college advisor who has recommended me for a scholarship.
- Studying skills, how to reach out when help is needed, kind of expected how college was.
- That time management and having a planner is something that you need in college.
- They helped me write my applications for college, helped with financial aid, helped improve my writing skills, and helped give tutoring in classes I was struggling in.
- Time management, study skills, advocating for myself, seeking help, looking for more opportunities, and planning ahead.
- To be punctual with time and that time management is key when you got to get your things done whether it be homework, work, chores, or anything that is responsibility.

Question: Were there any particular parts of the DTS programming in high school that have been (or were) especially helpful in college?

- Check in and work session in middle and high school 2. Summer programming (keeps me engaged and busy over summer) 3. Help with applications for fly in programs and college visits. 4. Just general informing about program and opportunities 5. General push to try new things & encouragement to reach for new opportunities when my schools failed in doing so. 6. emotional support. 7. Financial Aid answers
- Dots coding boot camp help me a lot because my career path focuses much around the same ideas and topics covered in the boot camp.
- ACT prep and the college campus tour trips
- bridge to college
- Bridge to College program was extremely helpful to me and my family because I was the first one to go to school.
- Early exposure to college culture via summer programs and having study sessions to help me learn how to study productively with others.
- Everything. This program is extremely helpful in every aspect of life. Before coming to college we did a one week college workshop. Everything that I was grappling with in regards to college was covered. From academic to economic problems and even social issues were addressed. This allowed me to learn and avoid problems in college. It made the transition from high school to college smooth and extremely pleasant.
- Going to UCLA's Unicamp with DTS, where I was gone for an entire week from home, has helped me cope with being far away from home in college. Also, the California Youth Think Tank helped shape my open mind and it helped me become very outspoken, which allows me to participate in class a lot, engage and ultimately learn.
- Having access to a math tutor, provided by DTS, during high school helped me not only improve on my academics but also on my social skills. My math tutor made himself available as long as the student reached out to him first. I took this practice to college and began to go to office hours and build a better relationship with my professors.
- I believe the various writing workshops DTS provided me throughout high school have drastically improved my reading comprehension and writing skills that have allowed me to succeed in college.
- I really liked the bridge to college part of DTS and the summer programming where we received a head start on writing college essays.
- I used to hate the Saturday writing workshops because I wasted all my day in the DTS office. Now that I look back at it, those days are some of my favorite memories because I got to bond with my peers and learn about writing. Writing is essential in college and it still fathoms me to see how many students come into college not knowing a single thing about writing. I'm grateful for the workshops and now I am a writing tutor to help other students who weren't as fortunate as me.
- I'd say hearing about summer enrichment programs that DTS paid for me to be a part of. If it wasn't for them giving the information about these programs I don't think I would have known about them on my own.
- My first tutor in high school that DTS provided for me proved to be most helpful because it made me realize it is okay to ask for help. I used to think only those who were not as smart needed tutoring but in fact no one does it alone.
- Presenting myself as confident in a new space around new people.
- SAT prep, college advising, and summer programming like camping going to Barnard.
- Self care! Always make sure you have time to do self care from a stressful time in school! It's healthy

- Study hall taught me it's really important to complete assignments somewhere far away from your room. DTS also offers health wellness sessions which I did not use in high school but I've found to be really helpful right now in college
- The college application workshops were incredibly helpful. For one, they helped me get into college. Second, they helped me gain valuable writing skills that I can use for writing resumes and just in general. I also think they provided a level of pressure that made me more comfortable with being under pressure.
- The social aspects of the program influenced me to be more reaching with strangers in the classroom. While my social skills are not great, they're improving.
- The writing program was helpful because it helped improved my writing in high school then college. Also, they helped find tutors for us in classes like physics and chemistry.
- Their college workshops during the summer before college were extremely helpful.
- They are very supportive and I could always talk to them when I was feeling stress or depression.
- Through DTS I was given the opportunity to be accepted for a month long program at Barnard College in New York. There I took classes focusing more in depth in the subject I wanted to pursue in college and was able to do it outside of California where I have never left before then. That experience gave me the chance to see how I could do away from my family and how it would be to study in smaller classes where students are expected more to participate in the class.
- When DTS would go over the differences between semesters and quarters and how much time we would have to learn the things in our colleges.
- Yes, receiving help on college applications. It's already a tedious process but because I was the first in my family, it made things even harder. But having DTS there to help me really went a long way.

Question: In what ways have (or did) check-ins positively benefit your college experience?

- A lot, the advising helped guide me through college. Also one of the staff went to the same school as I did so that helped because she knew what I was going through since we went to the same schools.
- As the week goes by I know there is someone back at home who supports the things I do throughout college and know that if I need the extra support there is someone there to help me out.
- Check ins helped me realize that although I may becoming an independent adult it is normal to ask for help. I should not have to deal with everything on my own and there are people willing to help and support me on any issue I have.
- Check-ins positively benefit my college experience because it allows me to talk to someone who I personally trust about both good and bad, and receive advice that helps guide me to the right path and make the right choices. This has ultimately allowed me to make very rational choices in college.
- Encouraged me to finish what I had to do in order to be able to talk about it in my weekly check ins.
- Gave me someone familiar to talk to about my experience and offer helpful advice in return.
- I always explained how I felt and made sure that my counselors knew what was happening at all costs.
- I know that if I need help someone is a phone call away & when I am on that phone call all my questions get answered.
- I think it is always nice to get an outside perspective from the situation. When you're in college you kind of get immersed in everything, and hearing from someone who has known you for years and understands you in ways that resources here in college might not be able to. Although our checkins are just conversations, they can help me change the mindset which I look at issues and remind myself that there are things I have the power to change and influence.

- I think it's a good way to receive an adult's perspective on issues which is always really helpful.
- It allowed me (someone who is very stubborn) to be restrained (not in a bad way) and guided through college. We speak about issues I'm facing and help me solve them. These check ins allow me to not go crazy and not spiral towards a rabbit hole.
- It allowed me to open up about the problems I was facing to someone who would empathize with me and guide me.
- It has academically kept me in line of doing what I need to do in order to pass my classes. This can come in the form of guidance or just a different perspective; it helps to talk to someone where we figure out the best possible course of action.
- It is nice having someone check up on you in your times of need. It is also nice that I can hear about skills used during their college experience that I can implement into mine.
- It lets me know that I have someone on my side even when things get tough.
- It's always nice to have someone in your corner that you can talk to. If I feel down, Stephanie, Carmen, and Mimi all rush in to remind me who I am and what makes me special. I've doubted myself here multiple times and they always remind me to push through and continue with my studies. They always make me feel at peace even if they are not with me.
- Made me have someone I know personally to talk to and that helps when I have to get something off of my chest because I still do not trust the people I call my friends with my feelings yet in the beginning of the college experience.
- The check ins reassure me with the issues I face in college. It's helpful hearing from my program their constant support in making sure I am not only doing good with my studies but my well-being is also in check.
- The weekly check-ins allow me to ask my college advisor for help, whether it be determining what classes to take, how to properly apply to FAFSA or even how to approach professors. These are questions I would have trouble answering but the weekly check-ins make it easy to get professional responses to each question I may have.
- The weekly check-ins gave me someone to who I could tell my school problems that wasn't a parent or peer. Check-ins with the wellness director really helped me learn how to deal with my stress and test anxiety. It's also helped me grow as a person. Those check-ins are different from the weekly check-ins.
- They have helped me put into perspective the bigger picture as to why I'm in college. Often times I get carried away with everything I have to do in my academics i forget that if I take time to relax and not take things so seriously that I can get through it.
- They help remind me that I have support and guidance; I don't have to work out the process alone. The help is at my hand's reach and approachable.
- They helped me remain focused and when I have someone to talk to it's easier to organize my thoughts and assignments.
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