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What's New

Student success “best practices”

As a part of its mission to build Missouri's future... by degrees, the Missouri Department of Higher Education partners with many organizations and professionals dedicated to student success and access to postsecondary education. One of those organizations is [College Bound](#), a St. Louis-based organization that provides academic enrichment, social supports, and life skills to promising high school students from under-resourced backgrounds. Founded in 2006, College Bound has made a significant impact on St. Louis youth, helping nearly 400 motivated students in struggling urban school districts gain access to and succeed in postsecondary education.

Through its important work with at-risk student populations, College Bound has developed some important “best practices” for helping these students overcome barriers and succeed in their educational endeavors. During the [December 2010 meeting](#) of the [Coordinating Board for Higher Education](#), College Bound Executive Director Lisa Zarin expounded on measures she and her staff implemented to help students matriculate at postsecondary institutions across the country. Additionally, the [Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance](#), which was created by Congress in 1986 and is reauthorized through 2014, issued a related [report in June of 2010](#) outlining the impact of grant aid on college access and persistence. College Bound and other organizations with a similar focus identify the following as potential barriers to college access:

- **Award letters.** Some of the issues associated with award letters include the timing, the format, and the inconsistent information provided. These barriers have been experienced by Missouri's students and have also been discussed and reported at a national level. On March 17, 2011, the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance held a hearing regarding financial aid award letters. Two of the key concerns related to award letters are:
 1. **Timing.** Postsecondary schools have their own institutional deadlines and timelines for applying for aid and for awarding aid. When students consider and compare their options – especially those students with limited financial resources outside of financial aid – it can be difficult to have a complete and realistic picture if a student has only some award letters.
 2. **Format and inconsistent information.** The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 required that the U.S. Department of Education develop a standardized financial aid award letter, but such a form has not yet been made available. In a [December 2010 survey report from Mark Kantrowitz](#), 84 percent of the student and parent respondents indicated that financial aid award letters should be standardized to make it easier to understand and compare options. Additionally, most award letters do not clearly state a student's cost of attendance, unmet need, or expected out-of-pocket costs. These factors are problematic for



students in general, but for an at-risk student from an economically depressed situation, these factors can become overwhelming barriers.

- **Verification processes.** Verification procedures among postsecondary institutions may vary greatly, with some financial aid offices being more thorough, requiring more documentation, or requiring additional information that is not required by federal regulations. Verification procedures may be intimidating to any college student, but when it comes to at-risk students, complex verification procedures may become an insurmountable barrier.
- **Living on campus and campus services are critical.** At-risk students may include unaccompanied homeless youth, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, first-generation college students, and those experiencing other personal hardships. Living on campus – where all of the utilities and meals and other living expenses are included – can provide stability allowing students to focus on studies instead of worried about paying bills. Additionally, postsecondary institutions can help make life easier for these students by keeping housing and campus services open during school breaks. Establishing emergency funds or fee waivers for at-risk students can also be helpful. The inability to pay a \$10 campus health fee can be enough to cause an at-risk student who falls ill to withdraw from school.

Grant Program, which was created by Congress in 2007 as part of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act and later extended via the **Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010**. The state of Missouri has distributed CACG funds through a sub-grant process for the last several years to non-profit, philanthropic organizations or consortia operating in Missouri. A **list of the most recent CACG award recipients** may be found on www.dhe.mo.gov.

College Bound is one of many organizations that have benefitted from the [College Access Challenge](#)