

The College Review

The newsletter of Think College Now, a college-focused small public elementary school

THINK COLLEGE NOW

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How We Think College Now: *It's When, Not If*

When Think College Now was just an idea in the heads and hopes of our future students, families, and staff, an ominous statistic challenged and motivated us. At the time, out of 20 Oakland high school seniors, only one would be eligible to attend a University of California school.

We set out to reverse that trend, by thinking college – starting in kindergarten. We resolved to create an environment so filled with college-minded opportunities that when TCN's students spoke of going to college, it would never be "if." It would only be "when."

This is happening, as our kids told *The College Review* when they discussed their upcoming "I'm Going to College Day" tour of UC Berkeley.

"I'm looking forward to 'I'm Going to College Day,'" says 5th-grader Brenda, "because I want to know what a real lecture hall looks

like, and I want to be prepared for the day that I actually go to college."

"I'm looking forward to that trip because I want to see the dorms I might sleep in at Cal," says fellow 5th-grader Mariana.

"I'm Going to College Day" is indicative of TCN's immersive college focus. For a month leading up to the trip, two Berkeley students visit TCN to do college-prep lessons, including a mock application process. 5th-graders choose a major, write a brief personal statement – even mock-apply for financial aid and scholarships. They all then receive acceptance letters and a backpack filled with items a college student might carry (dictionary, Frisbee, pencils, calculator, and more).

In other words, they are fully prepared to be a Berkeley student for the day.

"Getting the letter, walking the campus, going to actual college classes – this all makes it so real and tangible for them," says Mariana and

Brenda's teacher, Madeline Noonan. "That is a really big deal for them, and I think they come back hungry for college in a way they weren't before. We see a greater sense of urgency in their work."

Inside the classroom, Noonan and her fellow TCN teachers build on this forward-thinking focus through a project called "life maps," in which the kids plot out future milestones that will help them get to college and beyond.

"I think that teachers do these activities so we can learn how to be prepared for the CST and the SAT and all of the big tests we need to prepare for," says Brenda. "[On my life map] I decided to put the PSAT because if you take it, and do well, you get a National Merit Scholarship."

"I think those things are important to do, so we can get an idea of how our educational life is going to be and what we're expected to do in each grade," concurs Mariana. "I put Algebra and English Language Arts standards because those are two very important things to go to college."

"College is like a little seed TCN plants in students every day."

The life maps often connect back to “I’m Going to College Day,” which deepens their impact. “We see them add Advanced Placement Chemistry, saying, ‘I want to be a Chem major and take classes in Berkeley’s Gilman Hall,’” explains Noonan. “Another told me, ‘I want to master my math facts because I want to be an engineer. I was walking with that Berkeley tour guide who was an engineering student and she told me there’s a lot of math.’”

UC Berkeley has been a valuable college-prep partner in other ways, too. The university hosts TCN students at its Cal Day and at Kindercaminata, a day when our kindergartners tour the campus. Berkeley also sends Destination College AmeriCorps members to TCN for college-going support in our Family Resource Center as well as in our College Prep after-school tutoring program.

Aiming High

Principal David Silver identifies the East Bay Consortium (EBC), which runs “I’m Going to College Day,” as a key partner in TCN’s efforts. “When we founded the school, we looked for programs in alignment with our college vision,” he explains. “When we met with EBC Executive Director Monica Montenegro, she told us that out of 20 students who complete EBC’s Pre-Collegiate Academy, 19 end up going to college. We thought, ‘That’s the solution.’”

The Pre-Collegiate Academy (PCA) builds on the momentum of “I’m Going to College Day” by mentoring and tutoring students from 6th through 12th grade, and then through college. “I feel special being in the program,” says TCN alum Martin, now an 8th-grader at nearby ASCEND. “If I stay in PCA, it will help me go to a better college. It’s helped me a lot with my math and now I’m really smart in math. It’s helping me with what I’ll need to know in the future, in college.”

“PCA is one of the most important things TCN thought about,” says Martin’s mother and former TCN librarian Arcelia Gonzalez, “and Aim High is another really good program.” Aim High aims to “propel [middle school students] toward success in high school and college.”

“I really liked Aim High because we took a lot of academic field trips,” says Martin.



TCN students on “I’m Going to College Day” at UC Berkeley

His mother played a big role in TCN’s annual school-wide effort to get its departing 5th-graders into the program. “I helped all the kids and families with their Aim High applications,” she recalls, “and we made sure every single family got a phone call about the program.”

TCN students’ \$1,000 scholarship pledges from the East Bay College Fund are yet another way the school’s alumni stay motivated and focused. “The scholarship helps me a lot,” says Martin. “Whenever I’m talking about stuff connected to college, I always think about the scholarship.”

“College is like a little seed TCN plants in students every day,” reflects Gonzalez. “It’s college, college, college. Whenever I hear college, TCN is involved.”

Martin’s next big step is high school, this coming fall. Recognizing that choosing the right high school is another key step on the path to college, TCN recently hosted its first annual high school options meeting, where Martin and fellow alumni learned more about finding the high school that’s right for them. We look forward to supporting them wherever they go!

Every Step of the Way

Alumni like Martin exemplify the range of college-minded programs our kids have access to – both during their time at TCN and after. Our ultimate goal is to offer every student at least one college-prep opportunity every step of the way, including middle school and high school. For Martin, it was Aim High in 6th grade, then Pre-Collegiate Academy in 7th, which will follow him during high school and into college. Another partner supporting this goal is College Track, whose college-prep summer and after-school program begins in 8th grade and continues throughout high school and college. We are currently connecting our TCN alumni with these high-quality college access programs.

SUPPORT THINK COLLEGE NOW

To ensure that these college-focused traditions – \$1,000 scholarship pledges, “I’m Going To College Day,” PCA, and more – are available to current and future TCN students, we need your support!

You can donate by visiting www.thinkcollegenow.org/donate

or by sending a check to:

“OSF/TCN,” P.O. Box 20238, Oakland, CA 94620.

Thank you for supporting our students as they think college now – and in the future.

