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For every 100 students in the U.S. who begin ninth grade, 67 finish high school in four years and only 38 go to college (1).

Students are more than twice as likely to be taught by an out-of-field teacher in high-minority schools as they are in low-minority schools (2).

As they get older, poor children and children of color are left behind because of their lack of access to enrichment activities during the summer and after school. (3)

Only one in ten high school students of color in the United States today is likely to graduate from college within four years. (4)

These are the quotes that give the reader pause as they flash across the front page of the Breakthrough Collaborative web site. The Breakthrough Collaborative is a national educational program that provides a path to college for high-potential, low-income middle-school students in 25 communities throughout the U.S. (5). The flashing statistics place the success of the program in context. Academic success for the above mentioned demographic groups of students can certainly be dubbed a breakthrough. But it requires a well-organized program and energized teachers and mentors for success.

The Breakthrough Collaborative starts with a simple but necessary premise: To create the conditions for success, the program must create challenging educational opportunities for students and hire committed teachers. It is a simple beginning, but any successful program must start with these two elements in place. The organization has experienced 25 years of success.
using this as the foundation for their program.

Laura Noyes, a former director of a program in Sacramento, CA captures the tone best: “The Breakthrough formula is simple. Take a community that believes in children, add young people who will give their time to change the world, and throw in a delightful combination of kids at the most vulnerable time of their lives – middle school. And then, set deliriously high expectations for everyone involved – for the community to give more than seemed possible, for the teachers to work harder than was dreamed necessary, and for the kids to learn more than seemed available. It works. It’s wonderful. It’s Breakthrough.” (6)

The teachers in The Breakthrough Collaborative are high school and college students. To ensure their success, they are put into a challenging environment with strong support systems in place. During the eight week summer program these teachers work closely with the middle school students to develop strong mentoring relationships. The relationships and rigor are the ingredients for success. The interns are expected to work the entire day and prepare for the following day in the evening.

In their testimonials the teachers and students describe the experience as transformative (7). Jacob Sawicki, a former teacher in the program describes the experience as powerful: “Summerbridge did change my life in many ways, and has probably been the most important experience I have ever had. It challenged me. It pushed me, but most importantly it had faith in me and expected great things from me right from the beginning. It’s inspiring as a kid to spend time with adults that love you, respect you, and believe in you. It taught me how to create my own success. It taught me how to value my own gifts and talents. It taught me to be humble and how to work hard. It taught me that school could be fun.” (9).

Not surprisingly, The Breakthrough Collaborative has been rated as one of the top ten internships for high school and college students by the Princeton Review (8). College and high school students interested in working as a teacher can apply for a summer internship on line (9).

Every aspect of the program has a heightened sense of urgency and energy. This sense of honesty seems to define the organization and it’s philosophy. To take the demographic of students they refer to and move them into a new demographic of students who graduate from college requires enormous amounts of energy and commitment.

What separates the Breakthrough Collaborative from other summer programs is their honesty about the amount of emotional and intellectual effort that is required from teachers and students. An eight week intensive summer program may not be the way most middle school, high school, and college students would want to spend their summers. But for all the students, it will be the one summer they will remember— a summer when they made a personal breakthrough that led to a shift in the trajectory of their personal and academic life.

References:

(2) Richard Ingersoll (1998) University of Georgia, Unpublished,

(3) Benson & Saito, 2000; Clark, 1998; Copper, Charlton, Valentine & Muhlenbruck, 2000

(4) Scholar Jay Greene

(5) http://www.breakthroughcollaborative.org

(6) http://www.breakthroughcollaborative.org/aboutus/index.html


(8) http://www.breakthroughcollaborative.org/apply/index.html

(9) http://www.breakthroughcollaborative.org/successstories/index.html

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ONE THOUGHT ON "BREAKTHROUGH COLLABORATIVES: TEACHING INTERNSHIPS FOR HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STUDENTS"

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