

Parents' Insights on Their Perceptions of and Their Children's Experiences in a College Access Program



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PREPARATORY PROGRAM (PUPP)

ETS Research Report Series

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RESEARCH REPORT

Parents' Insights on Their Perceptions of and Their Children's Experiences in a College Access Program

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This report summarizes the findings of focus groups conducted with parents of former and current participants in the Princeton University Preparatory Program (PUPP), a college access and preparation program for low-income and high-achieving students attending public high schools in Princeton, New Jersey, and its surrounding communities. Conducted as part of the evaluation of PUPP by Educational Testing Service, the parent focus groups provided insights into the perceptions parents have of PUPP, its impacts on their children, and their suggestions for programmatic improvements. Findings suggest that parents perceived that PUPP prepared their children for academically rigorous environments and supported the development of their social-emotional skills. Parents also praised PUPP's assistance with the college and financial aid application processes but noted that their children continued to face financial challenges despite receiving sizeable aid packages. Overall, parents would like to see PUPP expanded to serve more students in more public high schools.

Keywords College access programs; minority students; access to education; high school graduates; selective colleges; college preparation; low-income students; cost of college; financial aid; college students; college bound; minority parents; focus group; parents of college students; parents of high school students

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MODERATOR: How do you describe PUPP to another parent?

PUPP PARENT: The one thing that I could definitely say to a parent that would [tell] me that they've been contacted by PUPP, I would just tell them that it is a unique opportunity for their kids to get ready for college, for the university. Going a step back, for high school, whether it's resources or not, it's very limited. The counselor can say, "You've got to do this, you've got to do that," but PUPP will definitely take them a step forward.

They actually—like the [college] touring. It's something that I don't think I would have been able to do it on my own with my daughter and myself to go in one week and visit 10 universities or 10 colleges. I think that is awesome. Not only that, but the preparation that they're getting personally and education-wise, I think it's wonderful. I would tell them, "With your eyes closed, just take it."

Princeton University Preparatory Program Overview

Since 2001, the Princeton University Preparatory Program (PUPP) has been providing college preparation support for low-income, high-achieving students from six public high schools in the communities surrounding the university. Developed by Princeton University faculty and staff, PUPP was designed to prepare its high school student participants, known as PUPP scholars, to apply to and succeed at selective colleges and universities. It aims to prepare PUPP scholars through a high-touch, intensive 3-year, year-round program focused holistically on developing skills across multiple domains—academic and social-emotional skills and cultural knowledge and familiarity—while also providing social support and mentoring and solutions for the challenges PUPP scholars' families face as a result of living in poverty.

PUPP activities are provided during the summer and academic year. Summer activities include an overnight experiential leadership development retreat, a 6-week summer institute, college visits, college fairs, arts and cultural experiences, mentoring, and family supports. School-year activities include weekly academic enrichment sessions, academic advising,

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cultural experiences, multiday college tours for juniors and seniors, college fairs, mentoring, and family supports. Senior PUPP scholars are also provided with personalized guidance on their college admissions and financial aid applications. Furthermore, PUPP alumni are supported through the transition from high school to college through summer bridge and other college orientation activities and throughout their college years through informal check-ins. PUPP strives to implement many college access program practices with demonstrated effectiveness, including providing mentoring and personalized support and offering academically rigorous activities and advising for participants.

PUPP also involves PUPP scholars' parents and guardians in programming throughout each program year. From the time that students submit their applications to PUPP in 9th grade until the PUPP graduation ceremony in 12th grade, and in many cases, into the college years, the PUPP staff ensures that parents and guardians¹ are included in the PUPP experience. Parents attend all PUPP ceremonies and holiday events and are sometimes invited to join their children for cultural events or college tours. They are also required to meet with the PUPP college counselor to plan for financial aid and college applications, and they are invited to information sessions on these topics and others.

Parent Characteristics

The PUPP application requires that students submit proof that their household income is low enough that they would qualify for a federal Pell Grant, federal financial aid reserved for low-income students, if they were applying to college in the current year. The net result is that all PUPP students are members of families with fairly similar financial means. Another common characteristic of many PUPP parents is that they have limited or no prior higher education experience. Data from the applications of PUPP participants indicate that 18% of current and alumni PUPP scholars' parents did not complete high school, 40% did not continue their education beyond high school, 28% completed some college course credits, 10% earned a bachelor's degree, and 5% earned a graduate degree. Although some PUPP parents hold a college degree, the majority of parents of alumni and current PUPP scholars have no experience of higher education.

In other ways, parents are quite diverse; some parents are native-born Americans, whereas others immigrated to the United States; some are single parents, whereas others are married; and some have one child, whereas others have multiple children. A few of the parents' perspectives were based on their experience of having multiple children participate in PUPP, whereas other parents brought the perspective of having only one of their children participate in PUPP.

Our Approach

In spring 2015, Educational Testing Service (ETS) was contracted to conduct an evaluation of PUPP. The mixed-methods evaluation was designed to include data from a variety of sources, including focus groups with PUPP parents.² In November 2015, the ETS evaluation team conducted three focus groups with the parents of PUPP alumni and current PUPP scholars (see Appendix A for the study methodology). The objective of these focus groups was to gather information from parents of PUPP scholars and alumni regarding key components of PUPP, including parents' and PUPP scholars' experiences of the program, their perceptions of the value and quality of PUPP, and the impacts of the resources and support PUPP provided. Focus groups were also designed to gather data on the transition of alumni into college as well as recommendations for improvements to PUPP.

Two focus groups were conducted with the parents of PUPP scholars participating in PUPP during the 2015–2016 school year, when the evaluation was conducted. A total of 30 parents of current PUPP scholars participated in two separate focus groups (19 in one group and 11 in another). A third focus group was conducted with parents of PUPP alumni. Eleven parents of PUPP alumni participated in this focus group.

Although we intended to create a stratified random sample of parents to invite to participate in the focus groups, the large amount of missing or incorrect contact information resulted in a shift to a convenience sampling approach. Parents of both alumni and current PUPP scholars were recruited through mailings sent to the most current address on file at PUPP. Alumni and PUPP scholars were also encouraged through social media posts to ask their parents to participate. Parents of current PUPP scholars were also told about the focus groups at PUPP family college information events. Participants were provided with dinner and a \$30 Visa gift card as incentives for participation in the focus groups.

The PUPP alumni focus group and the larger current PUPP scholar parent focus groups were transcribed,³ and a content analysis was conducted to identify themes and subthemes in parents' comments within and across the focus groups. The analysis was conducted in an iterative fashion using the NVivo qualitative analysis software program. The focus group questions were used to frame the analyses, and themes not fitting this framework were also identified.

Focus Group Findings: Key Findings From Princeton University Preparatory Program Parents

The ETS evaluation team identified five key findings from the focus group discussions with PUPP alumni and PUPP scholar parents:

1. Parents reported that the rigor of PUPP prepared their children to take on greater academic challenges and, among parents of alumni, to successfully transition to college.
2. Parents credited PUPP with helping their children to develop their social–emotional skills, including increased self-confidence and extraversion, as well as greater openness to new ideas and different perspectives.
3. Parents reported that their children were well informed about the college selection and admissions processes and knew what they wanted from their college experiences as a result of PUPP.
4. Parents recounted the financial challenges their children continued to confront in college, despite receiving strong financial aid packages.
5. Parents highlighted the importance of the financial contribution and incentivizing power of the PUPP stipend.

The following sections detail these findings and the data that support them.

Key Finding 1: Rigor of the Princeton University Preparatory Program Prepared Children to Take on Greater Academic Challenges and Successfully Transition to College

Parents agreed that PUPP's rigorous preparation helped their children to develop stronger study skills, supported their academic success in high school, and prepared them to successfully transition into college. Several parents reported that the academic rigors of PUPP supported their children's academic success during high school by pushing their thinking and challenging them to handle a larger workload. For example, one parent stated,

[PUPP] also stretches their ability because they're taking their regular classes at high school, but they're also taking additional classes with PUPP which is preparing them for [the SAT[®] test], so they carry a very heavy workload. With that they are extremely challenged and stretched.

Parents generally acknowledged that PUPP was demanding, requiring their children to dedicate a substantial amount of time to studying and to sacrifice social events with friends in favor of their PUPP assignments and activities. Many parents agreed that this rigorous training prepared their children for the academic demands of a selective college or university. A few parents mentioned that an important part of PUPP's rigorous training was for the students to become accustomed to taking a heavy course load with more challenging courses that require them to study many hours each day. One parent stated,

I think [PUPP is] very useful in getting them prepared in that mind-set [of being] almost constantly [focused on] schoolwork, so that when you go to school and you have [*Advanced Placement*[®]] classes and a very heavy course load, you don't balk at it. You get down to business and get it done. I think it's very helpful, because they expect it. They're used to it and it's nothing new.

A parent also remarked,

Academically, she's used to the long hours so having to stay awake to do homework, PUPP prepared her for that. Where some of the kids that she's met that didn't go through the program at the current college, they ask her how she's used to doing that and she was trained that way with PUPP.

Recalling a conversation with her son, a parent stated,

I remember when he went to school, I was telling him, “Isn’t that a lot of work? Are you okay?” He said, “Oh, don’t worry. I’ll be prepared for this in PUPP for a long time. This is easy for me.” This means, like [another parent] said, they prepare them to when they go to college [so that] it’s not going to be overwhelming. They’re going to be prepared for what is coming.

Furthermore, some alumni parents credited PUPP’s rigor with their children’s smooth transition into college. Some parents stated that their children were well prepared for and well informed about the transition to college. This, coupled with the increased self-reliance they developed through PUPP, played an important role in their successful adaptation to college life, according to several parents. One parent noted,

The transition from high school to college was smoother. For my oldest child [who did not attend PUPP] it was rough. I think PUPP, because of PUPP’s help, PUPP prepared my son for college. It prepared him so when the time came, he was ready.

Similarly, another parent felt that.

[the transition from high school to college] went rather well. It was a pretty smooth transition for my daughter. Because of PUPP the transition went very smooth. She didn’t really have any issues basically throughout her 4 years—very well prepared her.

Some parents also described their children as being strongly motivated to succeed in school in general as a result of their PUPP experience. Furthermore, they indicated that this increased level of motivation carried over to their college experiences and factored into their successful adaptation to the different and new experiences and demands of college life. In discussing the transition to college, several parents compared the experiences of their children who participated in PUPP with those of siblings who did not participate in PUPP. Parents generally described the PUPP alumni transition into and experience at college as more successful than for their siblings. Parents also generally characterized the PUPP alumni as more motivated, better informed, and more goal focused than their siblings who did not attend PUPP. One parent commented,

I have an older child and he was lost, completely lost. He actually didn’t know what to do. I don’t know what to do. I didn’t go to college myself. He started at [a community college], got discouraged and quit, never went back to school. He looks at my daughter and he says, “Wow, I wish I had those resources.” It could have been so much different, and he’s always telling everyone how proud he is of her and her accomplishments. Yes, it makes a big difference.

Discussing her child’s transition to college, a parent remarked,

The first year she still had the PUPP motivation, so her first year she felt that it was easy and smooth. Because she knew what she wanted and she was oriented, she kept [making progress toward her degree]. Unlike her [older sister] who wasn’t really quite sure what she wanted to do in college, so she changed majors at least three times.

Similarly, another parent commented,

I think [PUPP] built his confidence, which made it easier for him to transition into college [without finding] it difficult. I was surprised when he called me and told me that ... his first year he was able to get a little side job at college. He kept his grades [up] and graduated on time.

Referring to her children, only one of whom was a PUPP scholar, another parent stated,

I compare [our children], one in PUPP, one not in PUPP. I can see the difference. The one that is in PUPP ... she’s so excellent in organization, in exposure, motivation, and PUPP really helped her to be ahead a little bit of her brother, who is not in PUPP.

Key Finding 2: Princeton University Preparatory Program Helped Children to Develop Social–Emotional Skills, Including Increased Self-Confidence, Extraversion, and Greater Openness to New Ideas and Different Perspectives

Many parents reported observing signs of significant personal development in their children as a result of their participation in PUPP. Several parents reported that their children became more outgoing and demonstrated greater willingness to interact with others. As a parent noted about a child,

she's very shy, but since she [has been] in PUPP, she's [been] getting out of her shell. Now she does public speaking in PUPP and she also does it in school. She has gotten better and better [at it], and it's really good for her. She feels fine now. She was very shy before.

Similarly, a parent noted that her daughter has become more social due to PUPP, stating, "Socially, [my daughter] actually stands out [now]; people approach her because she's friendly, which is something that she got from [PUPP], being a little bit more outgoing." Another parent noted, "[My daughter] was a shy person, but PUPP made her break out of [her] comfort zone. Now she still keeps in contact with her PUPP friends."

Some parents described how their children demonstrated greater intellectual courage by doing more public speaking and participating more often in class as a result of PUPP. They perceived that their children had a greater presence in the classroom and expressed a greater willingness to step out of their comfort zone to communicate with others. For example, one parent stated,

They [encourage] him and he raises his hand. They understand him. [These are] the good things that he has been telling me [about]. I feel so happy ... that's he's enjoying this and I know he's going to go far from here.

To this end, some parents expressed hope that their children had conquered their shyness and felt comfortable conveying their ideas to others as a result of their participation in PUPP. As a parent noted, "it does push them also to come out of their shyness because they have to speak in front of the students in their classes and they have to become more familiar with other people."

Relatedly, some parents' comments indicated that some PUPP participants may have experienced an increase in self-confidence as a result of their participation in PUPP. One parent noted, "I think it's good ... because they have a chance to know how to listen to other ideas, and to also feel more confident in themselves, and they [are able to] talk with more people." Some parents also specifically mentioned how this increase in self-confidence impacted their children's academic success and transition to college. For example, a parent stated the following:

It made them more confident [outside of PUPP] so that when questions were asked in the class, they didn't sink in their chair to say, "Oh, gosh, please don't call on me." They were [there] with their hands up looking to be the first one [to be called on] because that's what they were pushed to do in the classroom ... at PUPP.

Parents also described their children as being more open to new ideas and different perspectives as a result of their participation in PUPP. Specifically, parents credited PUPP cultural events and field trips with exposing their children to diverse cultural experiences and perspectives. Parents described their expectations that this exposure to cultural experiences would enrich their children and enable them to participate in conversations at college. As one parent stated:

[the cultural experiences are] to prepare them [for] everyday life, like going to operas [and] going to museums. [They are intended] to prepare the students ... to have knowledge, so when they go to college they can have a conversation with different people.

Similarly, another parent commented,

I think it puts them on a different level culturally. ... It helps them to learn more about the culture. It makes them more rich culturally, learning about operas and plays. Puts them at a different level, a higher level, I would say.

In thinking about a child's transition to college, a parent remarked,

[The cultural experiences] help your child become well-rounded. ... We're not exposed to a lot of things because of our own cultures. So it introduces them to things that most of the kids that are in college will be familiar with, such as opera, different types of plays in different cities.

Key Finding 3: PUPP Scholars Were Well Informed About the College Selection and Admissions Processes and Knew What They Wanted From Their College Experiences as a Result of the Princeton University Preparatory Program

In focus groups, many parents credited PUPP with providing their children with the knowledge, resources, and personalized support they need to be successful and to make the most informed decisions they can about their postsecondary education. Parents also discussed how PUPP provided an opportunity for their children to visit colleges that they would not have been able to provide. Some parents implied that PUPP vested ownership of the college selection and application processes in their children to enable them to realize their own potential and discover for themselves which postsecondary educational institutions would be most compatible with their goals and needs. To this point, many parents agreed that the college trips played an important role in their children's decision-making processes regarding their postsecondary education. They reported that the college trips gave their children the opportunity to have a clear idea of what they wanted from the college experience. Regarding the college visits, a parent commented,

My daughter told me about this trip that they took to the colleges. She liked it. She told me that she will have a better idea of [where she wants to go to] college when she's ready to go. She won't have any trouble [choosing a college] at all.

Similarly, in recalling a child's sentiment about the college trips, another parent remarked,

[My daughter] thinks that the idea of them going to visit [colleges] is a great one, because young people don't normally have a clear image of what they want in life. Those visits really [help them to get a clearer] image of what they want in life.

Overall, parents agreed that their children were well informed about and well prepared for the college application process, as well as being aware of what they wanted out of their college experiences and of the different opportunities provided by selective colleges and universities. As a parent noted,

[PUPP] brings out your potential. Yeah, it helps bring out your potential. My son is in 11th grade now, because of PUPP now he knows what he's doing and where he's going. Without [PUPP] he wouldn't have [known] that, for sure.

Parents, particularly those who have not attended college themselves, may also learn a lot about the college application process through PUPP. One parent commented:

This is our first experience with a child going to college, so we were not aware of all what it takes to go to college. ... [PUPP] was really very helpful to us and a lifesaver to us, because we were trying to figure out this and figure out where to go and what is best. PUPP was very helpful and important to us because it just took [our son] and molded and directed him.

Similarly, one PUPP parent noted,

I think this program has been very educational both for my daughter and also for us. ... If it wouldn't have been for this, I don't know if I would have known where to go or which direction to take to help her with college.

Speaking candidly, another parent remarked that a child's high school does not provide this level of information on the college process:

One of the things that PUPP does is they [teach] the children about the [college application] process. Then, they involve us [in the college application process]. I have learned a lot. It's something that maybe [the high schools would not teach us].

Notably, parents also reported a transfer of knowledge about the college application process from the PUPP alum to a sibling. One parent described this benefit well by stating,

There's another [benefit] that I'm experiencing now with my son, [due to his] having all this exposure from PUPP. Now [that] he's older, he's teaching my 14-year-old [about how to prepare for college]. [He says], "I have to get you ready for it now." He has all this experience [he is sharing with] her, even though she's just in middle school. There's another benefit to it also, [for] the younger siblings.

Similarly, another parent described how her child helped her older sister enroll in a university:

My oldest was not in PUPP and she didn't know how to get all the resources or know how to guide herself to get into college. Now that [my daughter who was in PUPP] went to college and she had all these resources and knew exactly what direction she should take, she actually helped guide her older sister and now her older sister is currently [attending a university].

Key Finding 4: PUPP Scholars Continued to Face Financial Challenges Despite Receiving Strong Financial Aid Packages

Although many parents of PUPP alumni described their children as successful at adapting to college life, they also tended to report that their children experienced financial hardships during college. They described how their children struggled to cover the costs of textbooks and other necessary expenses. In some cases, students opted to reduce meal plans to pay for books or were simply unable to take advantage of educational opportunities, such as study abroad programs, because of their limited financial means. Some alumni opted to get part-time jobs that they then had to balance with their heavy academic loads. Intertwined in these conversations were the parents' frustrations at their own financial limitations and their limited ability to provide their children with additional funds to meet these financial challenges. As one parent noted, "it's tough. Financially, it's tough. Even though she has scholarships, still she has to pay something out of our pocket, and then out of our pocket and extra expenditure back and forth. It's tough financially."

Discussing a daughter's financial aid and the cost of attending college, a parent commented,

My daughter doesn't have scholarships; we have a loan which is still substantial. I'm a single parent, so I am struggling. As of right now it's her first year and she's used to not being able to do everything she wants to do anyway, so that has not been an issue for her, not being able to do something that somebody else is doing. However, the school that she's attending has a huge sticker price, so she sees those children whose parents have paid for school do all kinds of shopping and she just has to be told our situation. ... She's not able to do everything that she would like to do. She's studying hard because this is her first year, so she's still getting adjusted to what's expected from that school.

Another parent commented that the financial situation may prevent her child from studying abroad in college, stating, "Study abroad ... is very important. My daughter wants to study abroad, [but] when she talks of it, I put it down because I think I don't have any money to pay [for it]."

A few parents described their children's financial limitations in college and the way they attempted to make ends meet. One parent stated,

He tried to cut some of his meal plans in order to save money to get the required textbooks and to be able to meet the standard he's already set for himself. He's struggling because he realizes that we are struggling.

Another parent commented,

My sons, they have it difficult. The books [they need for science are expensive]. [We have done] so many things to ... buy those books. [He was working as a] dishwasher and then I [gave him] money, too. [As soon as he] went to the college that money [was] gone. I said, "Where's the money?" He said, "I spent all [of it] on the books because the books are very expensive."

Key Finding 5: Importance of the Financial Contribution and Incentivizing Power of the Princeton University Preparatory Program Stipend

Each summer, PUPP scholars are eligible to receive a \$750 stipend for satisfactory academic performance and outstanding citizenship in PUPP. In discussing the challenge of covering the cost of college, and particularly necessary expenses, such as textbooks, some parents suggested that PUPP offer the bulk of the PUPP stipend to students when they complete the program. Several parents suggested that students should be given smaller amounts of money during the program so that they will still have some spending money, while most of the stipend funds should be saved for them. Parents making these suggestions thought that this approach may alleviate some of the financial hardships PUPP alumni experience in college. One parent noted,

I just want to echo what the gentleman said about the stipends, if they could collectively just keep [them] all until the end because [we need the money for college] moving expenses. We had to get a new laptop. That wasn't cheap. That set me back a couple of bills that didn't get paid so I could get that laptop for her.

Another parent expressed a similar sentiment:

I think the kids need most of the money [from the PUPP stipend] ... when they are ready to go to college. Can it be done in such a way that most of the money can be saved for the children? Lump sum. I think [it would be better to use the stipend] to help them [cover college expenses].

Some parents also spoke about the stipend in relation to program participation in the high school years. Overall, parents generally agreed that the stipend was a good incentive for their children to attend PUPP but that it was not their children's primary motivation for participating in the program. Parents tended to report that their children participated in PUPP because they viewed it as an investment in their future. For example, one parent commented,

I think the money is a good incentive for my daughter, but I don't think that's the main reason for her to come here. I think she mostly does it because she knows it's going to be good for her in the future.

However, at the same time, the stipend is important because it makes it possible for students to have some spending money during the PUPP summer institute. Although PUPP does not permit students to be employed while enrolled in the program, parents implied that students might work anyway in the absence of the stipend. A few parents expressed concern that their children would get used to earning money if they had a job and would not want to do the hard work of earning a college degree. They seemed to be grateful to PUPP for giving their children the opportunity to earn more, in the long term, than the parents could. One parent noted,

I would feel that if they start working [after high school], they're not going to study anymore. They're going to like [having] money more than [they like studying] and they don't know that in the future the money they're earning right now is not going to help them out at all. I think [PUPP] helped her [to learn this lesson].

Similarly, another parent commented,

For me, I think the money was a good way to show him how easy or how better it is to study. When he came here, he didn't want to work too hard. Just his head, and he will have some money. When he finish here, he go with me to work, and he was working for 2 weeks painting, because that's what I do. He said it was easier, the school, definitely.

Conclusion

The focus groups with parents of current and former PUPP scholars provided information about participants' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the PUPP model. However, we should note that these perceptions may not be representative of the views of the full population of PUPP parents, given that participants were not a representative sample of the full population. The convenience sampling approach used for both focus groups may have resulted in sample pools with views that are more or less positive than the average parent of a current or former PUPP scholar may hold. Participation rates may also have been influenced by the incentives offered and by the location and time of the focus groups. Results should be interpreted with caution, given these limitations of focus group research.

Overall, we found that participants' views of the PUPP model were generally favorable, and only a few suggestions for improvement were made. Focus group conversations tended to highlight PUPP's benefits for students in terms of its helpfulness for preparation for college, for the transition to college, and for success in college. Parents' comments indicated that they view PUPP as making a valuable contribution to their children's preparation for and success in college. Parents of both current and former PUPP scholars described how PUPP positively influenced their children's self-confidence and reinforced and nurtured skills related to participating in class discussions. Recognizing the competitive environment of college admissions, parents expressed high hopes for their children's college admission and expressed relief and gratitude that their children had received or were receiving support to enable them to be admitted to and succeed at a selective college or university.

Parents reported feeling assured that their children were well informed about the college selection and admissions processes; knew what they wanted from their college experiences; and were prepared for the academic rigors of a selective college or university because of the knowledge they had attained, the social – emotional and academic skills they had developed, and the resources PUPP made available to them. A few parents suggested that these college access supports would not have been provided at the same level by the PUPP scholars' high schools. Furthermore, several parents highlighted PUPP's indirect influences on the siblings of PUPP scholars, who may in some cases benefit from the college application and enrollment knowledge PUPP scholars gained.

Parents also described the value of the support PUPP provided for college preparation and college applications and the helpfulness of the college tours; in some cases, parents indicated that they would not have been able to provide these resources for their children because of financial and time limitations. One parent stated,

PUPP provides that competitive level that she needs, because other ... families are rich. They have money and they can afford a lot of tutoring, a lot of extra courses, but my daughter is not [rich]. All the people from PUPP provide the kind of tutoring that I cannot afford.

Taken together, parents' comments indicate that the PUPP activities are working as they are intended — they are helping low-income, high-achieving students to prepare for and succeed in college. These findings support the need to continue the PUPP model in its current form, including the academic enrichment activities that prepare students for the rigor of college, the personal development activities that nurture students' social – emotional skills, the college application support activities and the college orientation workshops that enable them to enroll in college and engage meaningfully in their college education, and the cultural events that expose them to experiences that other college students may have had with their families.

Potential Areas for Enhancements to the Princeton University Preparatory Program

Parents offered two suggestions for enhancing PUPP:

1. *Some parents suggested PUPP save the summer stipend on each PUPP scholar's behalf to be used to cover moving expenses or to help buy textbooks once students enroll in college.* However, others felt it may be better to continue providing the stipends during each summer to provide the students with much-needed money that they would otherwise earn from a summer job. The decision to save the student stipends should be explored in-depth with students themselves, and with all PUPP stakeholders, because financial stability is such a great challenge for many PUPP students and their families. One option would be for PUPP to set up individual development accounts⁴ for PUPP scholars.

2. *Expand PUPP to serve even more low-income and high-achieving students.* With the necessary funding and staffing to expand the program, the PUPP model could change the lives of many more low-income and high-achieving students growing up without the advantages of their higher income peers. One option would be to expand PUPP not only in the Princeton, New Jersey area, but also into surrounding metropolitan areas through partnerships with other universities.

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Notes

- 1 Parents and guardians are subsequently referred to as parents.
- 2 For complete details on the PUPP evaluation, please refer to the final evaluation report by Millett and Kevelson (2018).
- 3 We debriefed and reviewed our notes after the second focus group and determined that the issues covered overlapped enough that it made sense only to transcribe the first, larger focus group. We also made this decision because we were just beginning the qualitative component of the study and were mindful of the budget.
- 4 According to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (2016), “individual development accounts are matched savings accounts that enable low-income families to save money for a particular financial goal, such as buying a home, paying for postsecondary education, or starting or expanding a small business.”
- 5 Some individuals did not complete the PUPP program because they moved out of the service district or withdrew from the program.

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Appendix A: Research Methodology

From the outset, we planned to hold separate focus groups for parents of current students and parents of PUPP alumni to allow for the exploration of specific college preparation activities with parents of current students and the more detailed questioning of actual college experience with the parents of alumni. Structured questions were developed for parents of current and alumni PUPP scholars (see Appendix B). The following sections detail our efforts to recruit parents for the alumni and PUPP scholar parent focus groups.

Recruitment

Although there was much overlap in the recruitment processes for both the alumni parent focus group and the current PUPP scholar parent focus group, there were some differences. The main difference was the accuracy of the contact information for parents of alumni PUPP scholars, in particular, for alumni from early PUPP cohorts.

Alumni Parent Focus Group Recruitment

One of our first steps in the recruitment process for the alumni parent focus group was to determine the eligible alumni sample from which to recruit the parents. PUPP houses its student records in Naviance, which is a college and career readiness data system. ETS extracted a data file of PUPP participants since 2001. A total of 273 records were exported, including records for individuals who did and did not complete the 3-year program (see Table A1).⁵ ETS reviewed the address and program status information and reduced the file of eligible alumni to 249 with viable contact information. Some students who had withdrawn from the program or moved out of the service area were not included. In addition, eligible alumni parents whose most recent address on record was outside the Princeton metropolitan area were excluded from the focus group because it was to be held in Princeton. We opted not to utilize technology to include parents residing outside the Princeton area.

Our target focus group size was 8–12 alumni PUPP scholar parents. Our intention was to stratify the alumni PUPP scholar parent group by the PUPP class year, partner high schools, gender, race/ethnicity, and information that PUPP provided about the alumni PUPP scholar's college enrollment (e.g., enrolled in college, stopped out of college, graduated from college, enrolled in graduate school or obtained a postgraduate degree). We soon learned that a potential impediment to recruitment would be contacting the parents because of the unreliability of parents' contact information. For a number of students, address information was either missing or outdated. We were fortunate to be able to supplement some of the extant address information with address information provided by the PUPP support person, who maintains her own PUPP parent contact lists for mailing purposes. One limitation of her list is that it too provided outdated address information for some parents. Given all of these impediments to contacting alumni parents, we opted not to choose a stratified sample and instead used a convenience sampling approach and contacted all alumni parents with a current address in the local area. ETS mailed out letters of invitation and fliers to parents (see Appendix C). The PUPP team assisted with the recruitment efforts for parents through informal conversations with parents during PUPP events and through social media posts.

Current PUPP Scholar Parent Focus Group Recruitment

As was done for the alumni PUPP scholar focus group, ETS sent out letters of invitation and fliers to parents of current PUPP scholars to invite them to participate in focus groups scheduled for November 8 and 11, 2015. In addition to the mailing, PUPP provided other opportunities for us to recruit parents of current PUPP scholars for the focus groups. First, PUPP sent fliers home with the PUPP scholars. Second, in October, at the invitation of PUPP staff, we recruited potential parent participants at the PUPP college tours and information sessions for parents of PUPP scholars in their junior and senior years of high school.

Table A1 Eligible Alumni PUPP scholar Profile

PUPP class grouping	No. participants	No. eligible alumni
Classes of 2004–2007	85	73
Classes of 2008–2011	96	86
Classes of 2012–2015	92	90
Subtotal	273	249

Princeton University Preparatory Program PUPP Scholar and Alumni Parent Focus Groups

The PUPP scholar parent focus groups occurred on November 11 and 18, 2015, and the PUPP alumni parent focus group occurred on November 18 (two alumni parent focus groups were planned, but only one was held due to the aforementioned recruitment challenges). A total of 41 parents participated in the focus groups. Eleven parents of PUPP alumni participated in one focus group, and a total of 30 parents of the 71 current PUPP scholars participated in two separate focus groups (19 in one and 11 in another). The focus groups were scheduled for the early evening. At least three parents had children in both groups. Financial incentives were used to encourage participation. Participating parents received a \$30 Visa gift card and dinner. We acknowledge that the sample of parents who chose to attend the focus groups was self-selected, or possibly stakeholder recruited, which impacts the generalizability of the findings.

Data Analysis

The PUPP alumni focus group and the larger current PUPP scholar parent focus group were transcribed. Analysis of transcribed focus group data was conducted using the NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software package (QSR International, 2012). Analysis of the focus group data was conducted using a coding process in which patterns in the data were noted and relationships or differences between these patterns were identified. Themes and subthemes were identified by clustering conceptually related data together, taking into account the logic and frequency of the patterns in the data. This process included regrouping data that may have been prematurely grouped. In addition, data were shuttled back and forth between first-level (main theme) and second-level (subtheme) groupings. To obtain a visual perspective of the results, a hierarchical tree was built displaying the different levels of data as main themes and subthemes. Direct quotations from parents were used to provide evidence for the existence of a theme or subtheme and any relationships that existed between them.

Appendix B: Princeton University Preparatory Program Focus Group Protocols

Princeton University Preparatory Program Alumni Parent Protocol

1. Please tell us your first name and the name of your son/daughter, what high school he/she attended, and when he/she graduated.
2. What is he/she doing now?

School Information

3. Tell me about your son/daughter: What was his/her high school experience like?
4. At your son/daughter's high school, who helped him/her get ready to apply to college? Was there a counselor or teacher or a program or service that helped him/her prepare for college admissions?

Parent Experience: Let Us Turn Our Attention to the Princeton University Preparatory Program

5. How do you describe PUPP to other parents?
6. Tell me about the PUPP staff—Dr. Klugman, Mr. Wilson, and Ms. Felder-Snipes: How did they work with your son/daughter to get him/her ready for college?
7. Did PUPP help with his/her academics? How?
8. What was your son/daughter's experience like with the other PUPP scholars?
9. Thinking back to when your son/daughter was in high school, what services did PUPP provide to you, as parents?

College Transition

10. How did your son/daughter pick his/her college?
11. In what ways, if any, did PUPP help your son/daughter move from being a high school student to a college student?
12. How did the first term at college go for your son/daughter?
13. What was, or has been, easy for your student at college? What has been hard?
14. As part of PUPP, your child may have attended a number of cultural activities, including plays and the opera. Do you think these experiences helped that child at college? If so, how?
15. Even with financial aid, students can find it hard to pay for costs at college — textbooks, fun with friends, transportation home. Has this been the case for your son/daughter?
16. Did any of you have a son/daughter who dropped out or transferred to another college? In your opinion, what led to him/her making this decision?
17. What did you expect from PUPP once your child graduated from high school and entered college?
18. PUPP's stated goal is to help students enroll at selective colleges. What are your thoughts about this now that your son/daughter has gone to college?

Reflections

19. Have you recommended PUPP to parents with children like yours?
20. What are your thoughts on the summer stipend for your student?
21. PUPP is offered at “no cost” to students or their families, though we understand that there are trade-offs, for example, sometimes parents have to take off from work to attend events, and students are not allowed to work during the summer institute. What are your thoughts on the value of the program?
22. Moving forward, do you have suggestions for PUPP?
23. Any final thoughts as we end? Is there anything you would like to talk more about or add?

Princeton University Preparatory Program PUPP scholar Parent Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

1. Please tell us your first name, the name of your teen, what school he/she attends, and what grade he/she is in.

High School Experience

2. Tell me about your son/daughter: What is his/her high school experience like?
3. At your son/daughter's high school, who is helping him/her get ready to apply to college? Is there a counselor or teacher or a program or service that helps him/her prepare for college admissions?

PUPP Scholar Experience

4. How do you describe PUPP to other parents?
5. There is quite a bit of focus at PUPP on your children going to “selective colleges.” What does attending a “selective college” mean to you?
6. Tell me about the PUPP staff—Dr. Klugman, Mr. Wilson, Ms. Felder-Snipes, and Ms. Ramirez: How do they work with your son/daughter?

7. PUPP is a 3-year program, which requires PUPP scholars to spend a lot of time during the summers and school year. Do you think PUPP is a good use of their time?
8. Has PUPP helped with their academics? How?
9. Does your son or daughter talk about the other PUPP scholars? What does he/she say about them?
10. PUPP takes your son/daughter to see plays and operas and to visit museums. What do you think your children get out of those experiences?
11. Last week was the 2015 PUPP College tour for seniors and juniors, and there are other campus visits over the year. What do you think your son/daughter has gotten out of those trips?
12. Was there ever a time when your son/daughter thought of leaving PUPP? If so, why?

Parent Experience

13. What services does PUPP provide to you, as parents?
14. How does PUPP keep you informed about the program and about your son/daughter's experience?
15. Earlier tonight, you said that your child wants to go to college. What concerns and questions do you have about the steps it takes for your son/daughter to go to college? A selective college?
16. What concerns do you have about your son/daughter going to college?

Reflections

17. Have you recommended PUPP to parents with children like yours?
18. What are your thoughts on the summer stipend for your student?
19. PUPP is offered at "no cost" to students or their families, though we understand that there are trade-offs, for example, sometimes parents have to take off from work to attend events, and students are not allowed to work during the summer institute. What are your thoughts on the value of the program?
20. Moving forward, do you have suggestions for PUPP?
21. Any final thoughts as we end? Is there anything you would like to talk more about or add?

Appendix C: Recruitment Material Examples

November 10, 2015

Dear Parent of <PUPP scholar name>,

As you know, Princeton University Preparatory Program (PUPP) helps high school students prepare for admission and success at selective colleges and universities. My organization, Educational Testing Service (ETS), is working with PUPP to organize group discussions with parents of students who have participated in PUPP. As part of our work, we like to talk with key members of the PUPP community. Parents and guardians of alumni PUPP scholars are definitely key members.

We would like to have a conversation with you to find out more about what you as a parent think about PUPP, your son/daughter's experiences in the program, the process for applying to colleges, and your son/daughter's experiences after PUPP—either in college or in work. The experiences and opinions shared may help us make recommendations that will shape the program that PUPP provides for students and their families. Also, you will receive a \$30 Visa gift card as a thank you.

We would like to invite you to a 90-minute meeting, which includes dinner and a parent discussion group. You are invited to attend one of the two conversations.

Wednesday, November 18

OR

Wednesday, December 2

Both groups meet from **6:30 pm to 8:00 pm** in **Aaron Burr Hall Room 219**, on the Princeton University campus. Free parking is available in Lot #10, behind Aaron Burr Hall.

We will have a Spanish interpreter (Vamos a tener un intérprete de español).

We really want to know your thoughts about PUPP and your child's experience in the program. We think your opinions are important, and we hope you can participate.

If you can join us for the discussion, you can e-mail me at pupp@ets.org. I would be happy to answer your questions.

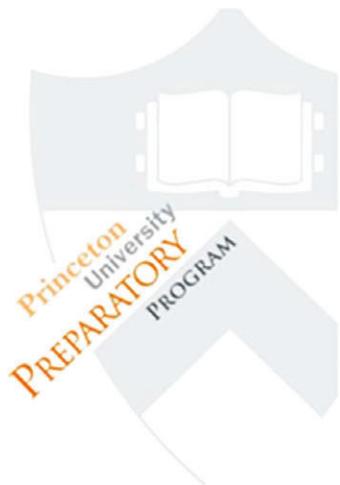
I hope to have the opportunity to meet you.

Thank you,

Stephanie Saunders

ETS, Policy Evaluation and Research Center

Conversation with PUPP Alumni Parents



How did PUPP help your son or daughter?

How did PUPP help you as a parent?

What is PUPP doing well?

What suggestions do they have?

What has college been like for your child?

Please join us

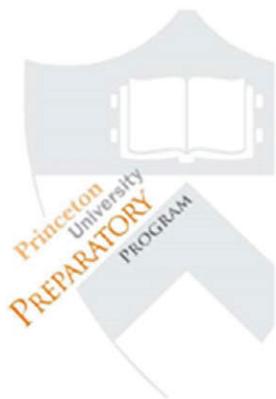
Wednesday, November 18 or Wednesday, December 2

6:30 pm in Aaron Burr Hall, Room 219
on the Princeton University Campus

Dinner and \$30 Visa® gift card provided.

Spanish interpreter available. Vamos a tener un intérprete de español.

A Conversation with PUPP Parents



How has PUPP helped your child?

How has PUPP helped you?

What is PUPP doing well?

What suggestions do you have?

Please join us on either

Wednesday, November 11

or

Wednesday, November 18

6:30 pm in Aaron Burr Hall, Room 219
on the Princeton University Campus

Dinner and \$30 Visa® gift card provided.

Spanish interpreter available. Vamos a tener un intérprete de español.

Suggested citation:

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