

# The Educational Value of Alumni for Public High Schools

Spring 2019

**Purpose:** To determine the potential of volunteer high school alumni to improve educational programming and services at public high schools to benefit current students.

**Finding:** Effective use of volunteer alumni, perhaps through mechanisms such as Alumni Toolkit, are a helpful, often untapped, resource to enhancing low-cost, impactful educational programming for U.S. high school students.

Are alumni volunteers a hidden, underutilized resource for U.S. public high schools? They just might be. In the spring of 2019, researchers from UC San Diego CREATE asked this question by studying 15 schools attempting to increase their use of volunteer alumni to enhance educational programming for students. These schools field-tested a new, cloud-based service, Alumni Toolkit, designed by Future First USA, that builds networks between schools and alumni for students' educational benefit. The 15 schools, who serve majority low-income, high-need students, created 20 alumni-involved events often to enhance career and college advising. These events ranged from small group panels to larger alumni-infused events celebrating graduating seniors. Overall, the study collected input from 8 educators, 102 students and 34 alumni and observations at all 20 events. Analyses of interviews and observations revealed that all groups responded positively to their participation as event creators and attendees. Educators enjoyed creating events and often used the Alumni Toolkit to help identify, recruit, sort, and catalog alumni volunteers. Students reported learning practical knowledge and gaining motivation from alumni interactions. Alumni enthusiastically reconnected with and supported their schools.



## Study Sites:

15 Participating High Schools from:

- Grossmont Union High School District
- San Diego Unified School District
- Sweetwater Union High School District
- Vista Unified School District
- High Tech High & other charter schools

## Data Collected:

Alumni events observed: 20

Alumni interviewed: 34

Educators interviewed: 8

Students interviewed: 102

**76%** of participating high school students reported that they gained new knowledge from the events.

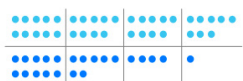
**84%** of participating high school students reported that they would be willing to attend another alumni-related event in the future.

**100%** of participating alumni interviewed reported they would participate in another alumni-related event at their home high schools.

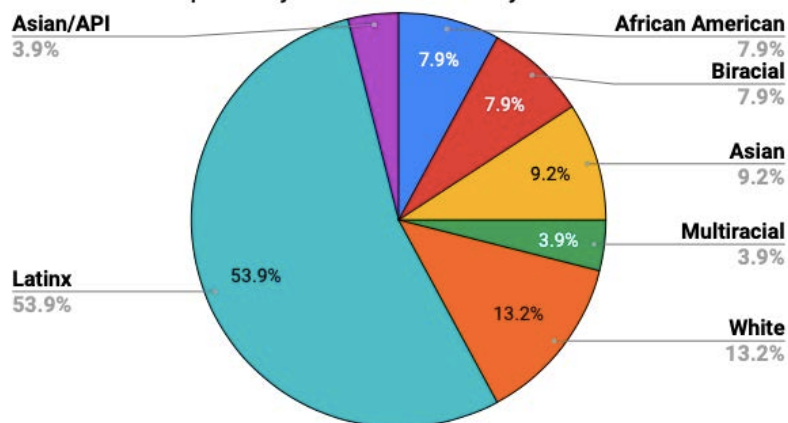
Educators reported that using Alumni Toolkit was "easy" and gave them a "jump start" on using alumni more regularly.

**As one counselor stated, "They [the alumni] are the stars of the show and their stories are invaluable for our students."**

All 15 high schools reported (informally) that they plan to "ramp up" their use of the Alumni Toolkit, and alumni engagement next year.



Student Participants by Race and Ethnicity



## Main types of Alumni events:

Celebratory end-of-year events

Career panels

Q&As re: the college experience/college tours

## Students in their own words:

*"I would do this [attend] again. My parents didn't go to college, so alumni can give the kind of reassurance that my parents can't. My mom went to cosmetology school, but no one went [to] college."*

*"I find it very interesting to see that they are a product of [my high school], and it's very inspiring to see them do things that we could potentially do."*

*"I liked getting information directly from people who have been through the college experience recently or are continuing through college."*

*"I believe alumni events are very important and I think it would be exciting to attend more."*

*"High school is hard, especially now. I come back because I can say 'I'm just a girl from [my community] and I'm making it.' It's important for them to know that I'm just someone just like them, and I'm making it. And my kids are making it too." - Participating Alumna*

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