The KCS program targets low- and modest-income students in Kansas City area high schools, whether public, charter, private, or home-based, as well as low- to modest-income adults with some college. KCS has established annual targets for each of its three scholarship opportunities.

The Kansas City Scholars (KCS) program seeks to strengthen the college-going culture in the greater Kansas City region by increasing postsecondary attainment and reducing opportunity gaps across age, income, and ethnicity. After just three scholarship application cycles, KCS has already become a vital and broadly recognized institution in the metro area with effective collaborations with about 120 high schools and 17 institutions of higher education.

KCS has successfully implemented three cycles of scholarship applications and awards (and is in the midst of a fourth cycle). Building on the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation’s initial investment, the three-pronged scholarship program is beginning to support the college-going of over 600 traditional students and is continuing to support the return to postsecondary studies of adult learners.

In 2017 the program awarded 564 scholarships, 815 in 2018, and 946 in 2019.

The number of awards made annually is based on the additional funds raised.

**TRADITIONAL**
250 AWARDS
Two hundred fifty awards are targeted for currently enrolled 11th graders, who will receive up to $10,000 per year, paid directly to the college, renewable up to five years. Starting with the program’s second cohort of scholars, the University of Missouri has provided matched funding for KCS to identify several hundred additional 11th graders for scholarships at its flagship Columbia campus and its Kansas City campus.

**ADULT LEARNERS**
200 AWARDS
Two hundred awards are targeted for adults age 24 and older who have previously earned at least 12 college credits; they will receive up to $5,000 per year, paid directly to the college, renewable for up to five years. As of 2019, eligibility for adult learners has been expanded to include adult associate degree earners who want to complete a bachelor’s degree.

**COLLEGE SAVINGS ACCOUNTS**
500 AWARDS
Five hundred 9th graders receive $50 in a 529 College Savings Plan. Among these, 50 are selected to receive a four-to-one match for any contribution made to the plan, not to exceed a total of $5,000, with the potential for an additional $2,000 for students who achieve college-ready milestones during high school.

In addition to the financial awards, the program offers supports during high school, in the community, and through higher-education partners to facilitate successful college enrollment and completion.

**MOVING FORWARD**

KC Scholars staff take pride in their accomplishments and have set continuous improvement goals. Staff have built strong collaborations with several partners to address systemic barriers to adult learners enrolling in college. They plan to improve the outreach and marketing of the college savings account seeding and match, and to increase the financial literacy of parents and students. They also plan to continue to strengthen supports for traditional scholars as these learners transition to postsecondary settings.
The first cohort of KCS traditional scholarship awardees have now completed a year of college. Our evaluation includes an online survey of these students and an analysis of enrollment and persistence using National Student Clearinghouse data. We also conducted focus groups with students from the second and third cohorts.

The scholarships are largely reaching their intended audience.

- The scholarships are being awarded to low- to modest-income students. The Expected Family Contribution for traditional scholar applicants and awardees has decreased over each cohort, suggesting an increase in financial need over time. Further, the percentage of students on free or reduced price lunch has increased in each cohort, and the percentage of students with a parent who has earned a 4-year college degree has decreased.

Among applicants, average EFC has fallen from 2,600 to 1,800 across cohorts; for awardees, it has fallen from 1,150 to 630.

- Most of the submissions and awardees are female and students of color. In each cohort, over two-thirds of applicants and three-quarters of awardees are women. Similar shares are students of color. Latinos/Latinas account for the highest percentage of traditional scholarship awards.

The first cohort of traditional scholars were no more likely to enroll in college immediately after high school, but they were far more likely to enroll in a 4-year institution.

- The scholarship led to a 21 percentage point increase in 4-year college attendance, and a similarly sized decrease in 2-year college attendance. For students near the cutoff score for determining which applicants would be offered a traditional scholarship, the college enrollment rate was about 84 percent, both for those offered the scholarship and those not. However, nearly all students offered the KCS scholarship who enrolled in college did so at 4-year institutions, whereas about one-fourth of enrolled students in the control group enrolled in a 2-year college.

Students awarded the KCS scholarship were no more likely to enroll in college overall in the first fall, but they were 21 percentage points more likely initially to enroll in a 4-year college.

![Bar chart showing enrollment rates comparison between KC Scholars and Controls.]

NOTE: Figure compares students just above and just below award threshold.

*significant at the 0.10; ** significant at 0.05; *** significant at 0.01.

- The scholarship did not seem to affect retention rates for the first cohort of traditional scholars. Students offered the KCS scholarship had similar college retention to students just missing being offered the scholarship, and this held for both fall to spring and to the following fall. Although the retention rates were similar, the large positive impact on enrollment in a 4-year college persisted into the fall of the second year.

- The first cohort of traditional scholars self-reported positive academic progress during their first year of college. Students took an average of 27 credits during their first year (2018-2019) and earned an average GPA of 3.09. Over 90 percent said they planned to return to the same college in fall 2019. Between 40 and 70 percent of students reported that the scholarship led them to take more credits, work less, borrow less, study more, achieve better grades, and participate more in clubs or extracurricular activities.

- Almost one-quarter of cohort 1 traditional scholars indicated that without the scholarship, they would not have attended college right after high school. Another 40 percent reported they would have attended a different college—usually a 2-year college—and the remaining one-third said they would have attended the same college but would have worked more, borrowed more, or received other financial aid.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ADULT LEARNERS

All three cohorts of KCS adult learners have enrolled in college. For cohort 3, KCS altered eligibility requirements to allow adults with an associate degree to apply, but this component remained undersubscribed: 196 scholarships were awarded in 2019 (goal of 200).

The adult scholars mainly reside in urban Kansas City. However, the share in other counties expanded in the third cohort.

Over 60 percent of the cohort 3 adult learner scholarships went to residents of Jackson County, MO, a decline of over 10 percentage points from previous cohorts.

Among adults, the scholarship significantly increased retention in college.

- Fall to spring retention increased for both the first two cohorts of adult learners. Fall to spring retention during the first year increased by 20 percentage points for the first cohort of adult learners, and 14 percentage points for the second cohort, both relative to matched comparison groups. Furthermore, the first cohort was 28 percentage points more likely to be enrolled in the following fall than the comparison group.

- Among adults, the scholarship also significantly increased full-time attendance in college. For the second cohort, adult learners were 13 percentage points more likely to enroll full-time in their first semester than comparison students; this boost was 12 percentage points for the first cohort. Moreover, this increase persisted in the second year of enrollment, as first cohort adult learners were 16-18 percentage points more likely to enroll full-time in 2018-2019.

KCS adult scholars were much more likely to be enrolled – overall, full-time, and in the next academic year.

- Adult learners showed greater persistence, including some academically weaker students. As of fall 2019, of the 95 adult learners from the first cohort who began two years earlier, 8 have graduated and 56 were still enrolled.

Adult learners are motivated by career-oriented goals and pursue college programs locally.

- For adult learners, improving their employment situation is the overriding goal. These scholars hope the scholarship will enable them to work in a different occupation that pays more (60 percent) or stay in their current occupation but earn more (30 percent).

- Adult learners desire career-oriented programs at local colleges. Many express interest in business and entrepreneurship or careers in health. Roughly one-quarter work in the latter sector, and another quarter work in government or for nonprofits.

Adults are hard to reach and need supports for success but are constrained in ways that make accessing supports difficult.

- For the third cohort, allowing individuals with an associate degree to apply for the adult learner scholarship changed the pool of applicants. Applicants for the third cohort self-reported higher GPAs from their prior postsecondary enrollment, and a smaller share of applicants listed academic reasons when explaining why they did not complete their prior degree program.

- Adult learner scholars sought to balance competing demands through course scheduling. Some chose evening classes, some dropped classes and attended part-time, and a few chose online programs to accommodate their schedules. However, adult learners frequently have tight schedules or other constraints that make it difficult to avail themselves of existing supports.
COLLEGE SAVINGS ACCOUNTS

All three cohorts of the college savings account (CSA) component are still in high school: seniors, juniors, and sophomores across the three cohorts. Savings accounts can ease the financial burden of college, especially with regular contributions, and more so when contributions are matched.

The college savings account awards process is completed in three steps.

The county of residence distributions for matched and seeded awardees are almost identical.

Many students in the first cohort of college savings accounts awardees were eligible for and received traditional scholarship awards in 2019.

- Many students who applied for the college savings plan in 9th grade (first cohort) also applied for the traditional scholarship in 11th grade (third cohort). Of the 231 students with a matched or seeded college savings account from the first cohort, 113 applied and were eligible for the third cohort of the traditional scholarship. Over one-fourth (31) of these applicants received a traditional scholarship, and an additional 49 were offered a scholarship to UMKC or University of Missouri-Columbia.

- The savings match alters college aspirations toward 4-year institutions.
  - As with the traditional and adult scholarships, the possibility of obtaining the match shifts student aspirations from 2-year colleges to 4-year colleges. When CSA applicants were asked for college choices if they receive the match, the institutions with the four largest shares were all 4-year universities. Community colleges drew just over 10 percent of responses. Under the scenario of not receiving the match, the community college share increases to over one-quarter and the share for the universities falls by about 20 percentage points.

- Most CSA awardees (seeded and matched) are women, persons of color, and come from homes with modest educational achievement.
  - Students receiving seeded accounts are predominantly female; matched awardees are even more so. Almost 85 percent of matched awardees are female, which is higher than the two-thirds of seeded awardees.
  - The majority of students live in homes in which their parents have modest educational achievement. More than two-thirds of seeded awardees and four out of five matched awardees indicate their parents do not have a college degree.
  - Persons of color account for a large majority of matched and seeded awardees. Just over one-quarter of matched and seeded awardees self-report their ethnicity as white; the other three-quarters are either students of color, including multiracial backgrounds, or have chosen not to identify their race/ethnicity.

- The concepts of savings accounts, matching, and portfolio choice are complicated for early high school students.
  - Marketing a college savings match program to 9th graders is challenging. Students lack full understanding of how the CSA component works. This has hindered participation, especially in earlier cohorts. Students indicated uncertainty about how contributions are made or how the portfolio is managed.