



# The Roger Lehecka Double Discovery Center

*Getting community youth to, through, and beyond college*



**In this October 2020 issue:**

- **DDC College & Career Success:  
Discovering Their “Best Fit” College**

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## **DDC College & Career Success (CCS)**

Preparing for college is a long and arduous process. At DDC, it begins in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, with students getting an understanding of the life-altering potential of a higher education; and continues through senior year when they submit carefully reviewed applications tailored to each college on their “best fit” lists.

College Counselors are essential throughout this rigorous process. Students need support and guidance every step of the way, to uncover their talents and aspirations, navigate the complicated bureaucratic maze, and translate passions into fulfilling careers. Unfortunately, high-quality, individualized college counseling is not easily accessible. Most NYC public schools have only one guidance counselor for some 400 students, while private college counselors provide one-on-one coaching at an average hourly rate of \$200. The cost of professional college counseling to help students navigate the college process and find their “best fit” college is out of reach for low-income, first-generation students with college aspirations.

Our College & Career Success (CCS) programming addresses this issue and others as early as 7<sup>th</sup> grade. We bridge the college counseling equity gap by providing students with early interventions so that they achieve college readiness by 12<sup>th</sup> grade. CCS, alongside Academic Enrichment and Healthy Minds & Bodies, is a core component of DDC’s comprehensive,

research-based approach to expanding educational opportunities for community youth. Six professional college counselors and about 40 College Success Mentors, who are Columbia University volunteers, work with our students to help them uncover their interests, talents and passions. Students then determine their college and career matches, apply to their “best fit” colleges and follow the career roadmap of their dreams. DDC also teaches the knowledge and skills, such as self-confidence, resilience and effective decision-making, that will benefit them for a lifetime. Our results speak for themselves: Every year about 90% of DDC seniors graduate from high school and enter college the next fall. Some of the college acceptances for DDC’s class of 2020 include Columbia University, Princeton and Vassar.

The CCS program follows the [\*Eight Components of College and Career Readiness Counseling\*](#) identified by the College Board – the nonprofit that operates the SAT test and the Advanced Placement exams – as the best methodology for effective college success preparation. DDC builds students’ awareness of the college process early on so that they learn to make productive decisions throughout their educational journeys. The program covers five levels – 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade, 11<sup>th</sup> grade, 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and alumni – and includes classes and one-on-one mentoring, tutoring and counseling sessions.

### **7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade - Introduction:**

*Why should I go to college when I can be a TikTok (or a YouTube) star?*

Students learn to build their Middle School to High School roadmap based on interests and talents, adopt a growth mindset – the self confidence that dedication and hard work develop skills – for effective learning and assess their past experiences and new academic activities to develop self-awareness. This time is about encouraging students to see education as the means to become the best version of themselves and develop a lifetime love of learning.

### **9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade - Reinforcement:**

*Figure out who you are!*

Counselors help students meet high school requirements and strengthen their study habits and lifetime skills, such as communication, goal setting, and action planning. They introduce students to different school subjects and experiences, including informational interviews with professionals in their fields of interest. These new opportunities increase students’ self-awareness and bring to light the intersection of aspirations and college degree/career.

Students explore college through the MARS framework (**M**oney, **A**cademics, **R**esources, **S**tudent Life) to research and assess how colleges match their “best fit” list. By the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade, they have perfected their “High School to College & Career Roadmap.” They connected their interests and talents with specific careers, and they have mapped their own strategy to get there.

### **11<sup>th</sup> grade – Production:**

*No time to waste!*

In addition to working with Counselors, students now meet with a DDC College Success Mentor on a one-to-one basis to navigate the college admissions process. Mentors – volunteer Columbia University students – show them the ins and outs of the college environment and culture as they work together on each component of the college portfolio, from engaging essays to letters of recommendation to financial aid roadmap. They also develop action plans to align academic and extracurricular experiences with college aspirations. Issues they discuss with their mentors include *How do I leverage my strengths and resources? How do I address my areas for growth so I can achieve my goals?* By the end of 11<sup>th</sup> grade, their college applications are almost complete and they are fluent in financial aid and budgeting jargons.

### **12<sup>th</sup> grade - Refinement:**

*Home Run!*

DDC students are now ready for and confident about the college life that lies ahead. With

their Counselor's help, they continue to build on self-knowledge and refine their college portfolios. They submit their finalized applications and keep in regular contact with the colleges on their lists to demonstrate continued interest. When they receive college acceptances, Counselors show them and their parents how to decode the financial aid packages offered and make the best-informed decision for college selection. Once they make their final choice, they identify campus support services they may need and select clubs/organizations they plan to join. In addition, DDC's financial literacy program show them how to plan and manage a personal budget in support of their financial and other life goals.

### **DDC alumni in college:**

*Graduation and a meaningful job!*

College enrollment is step one in the journey from high school to, through, and beyond college. DDC continues to guide its alumni through college persistence, graduation, and career pathways with weekly one-on-one counseling sessions and workshops on related topics such as financial literacy, equity and inclusion in the workplace, managing one's career journey, etc.

### **From 7<sup>th</sup> grade to senior - Lisvanny P.'s perspective**

Lisvanny P. loves science and wants to major in biology and research with a minor in marine biology. She plans to attend veterinary school.

*I always knew I was interested in science, but DDC helped me determine the specific field I wanted to pursue. The counselors helped me enroll in DDC classes that broadened my horizon and they encouraged me to attend "Girl's Science Day," a day-long program led by researchers and graduate students at Columbia University. I enjoyed it so much, it was the first time I had the chance to do lab experiments! Now, I am taking DDC's "Biology of Covid-19" class with Dr. Russel. We use the microscope and it is so cool!*

*At school, college counseling is reserved for seniors and all they give you is instructions, they do not walk you through each of the steps. DDC college counseling is much more personal. Counselors start preparing you way before 12<sup>th</sup> grade. I knew I could knock on my DDC counselor's door any time with questions. Even now, I can contact my mentor, by phone or through Zoom, to discuss how to write my resume and essays and find the right internships, and to review my list of colleges to make sure that they well match my love of science and my dream of becoming a vet. DDC has helped me so much!*

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Partner with us to offer the gift of education! To help fund our programs and expand our outreach, click here: ["Change a Life"](#)

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**Calling all DDC Alumni and Former Volunteers!  
We want to hear from you!**

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