

## 2017 KIPP Alumni Survey

### *Identity and Belonging Matter in College*

#### **KIPP and the Journey To and Through College**

KIPP is a network of more than 200 public charter schools nationwide, enrolling nearly 90,000 students in grades pre-K through 12. KIPP's mission is to prepare all of our students for lives filled with choice and opportunity, and to give them the tools needed to thrive in their education and the competitive world beyond.

Today, 11,000 KIPP alumni are enrolled in colleges and universities across the country. Our alumni currently graduate from four-year colleges at a rate that is above the national average for all students and four times the average for students from similar economic backgrounds nationwide.

KIPP is intentional about how we support our students in their journey to and through college. KIPP Through College counselors in each of our 31 regions support students as they prepare for and select the right college and career based on their interests and passions. After high school, KIPP advisors help alumni navigate the academic, social, and financial challenges they encounter while in college or pursuing a career. We also have [partnership agreements](#) with over 90 colleges and universities across the country that have made a commitment to increasing college graduation rates for KIPP alumni and other first-generation college students from under-resourced communities.

#### **How KIPP is Learning from our Alumni**

We constantly improve our work by listening to our alumni; they are the experts on their experiences. KIPP makes multiple efforts to hear alumni stories so we can learn how to better support them. We also share the insights learned from our alumni with the larger higher education community so their reflections can benefit all students pursuing a college degree.

In January 2017, KIPP published [results](#) from our Alumni Survey for the first time. Our findings from this survey, which was conducted in 2016, illuminated key challenges for KIPP alumni in college when it comes to managing finances and finding work-study jobs and internships. We learned that 25 percent of our alumni in college are financially supporting other family members at the same time they are going to school, and that 40 percent of our alumni in college skip meals to pay for other expenses. We shared these findings with our college partners and regional leaders so that we can both improve our guidance practices and advocate for new approaches.

#### **2017 Alumni Survey: A Look at Belonging and Identity**

The vast majority of KIPP alumni are students of color who are the first in their families to go to college. Many of our alumni tell us that when they feel a sense of belonging at college, they do better in school. This insight is backed up by a growing body of research.

We know a stronger sense of belonging is associated with positive benefits like higher grades, better mental health, and well-being, and that small interventions can increase a student's sense of belonging overall. We will use these data from the 2017 KIPP Alumni Survey to influence our own next steps about how to better support our alumni in college and beyond.

### **Why Belonging Matters: A Look at the Research**

Nationwide, there's a crisis of college completion, particularly for first-generation college students and students of color from low-income backgrounds. The financial difficulties of making it to graduation are well documented for these students, but recently a less tangible factor – a sense of belonging – has also been shown to impact college completion rates.

A 2017 literature review from the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine described belonging for college students as when they *"feel that they belong in college, fit in well and are socially integrated."*<sup>i</sup> This can relate to whether a student sees their identity affirmed or reflected in their college environment. The National Academies review found that 85 percent of the studies they examined showed a student's sense of belonging had a positive impact on their GPA.<sup>ii</sup> George Kuh at the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative provides a simple explanation for this: when students feel they belong, they have greater energy left to approach the other social and academic challenges of college.<sup>iii</sup>

Research by David Yeager and others suggest there is room for schools to make positive change around a sense of belonging.<sup>iv</sup> Interventions and efforts to increase belonging can lead to higher GPA and well-being. In a 2011 study by Gregory Walton and Geoffrey Cohen published in *Science*, African American students who participated in a program designed to increase belonging and connection increased their GPAs and overall academic standing.<sup>v</sup> A 2014 study by Stephens, et al showed that first-generation students who attended orientation panels addressing class background showed an increased sense of well-being and "fit" on campus. They also had a higher GPA than students who did not attend such panels.<sup>vi</sup>

### **KIPP's 2017 Alumni Survey Findings: Identity, Belonging, and Community**

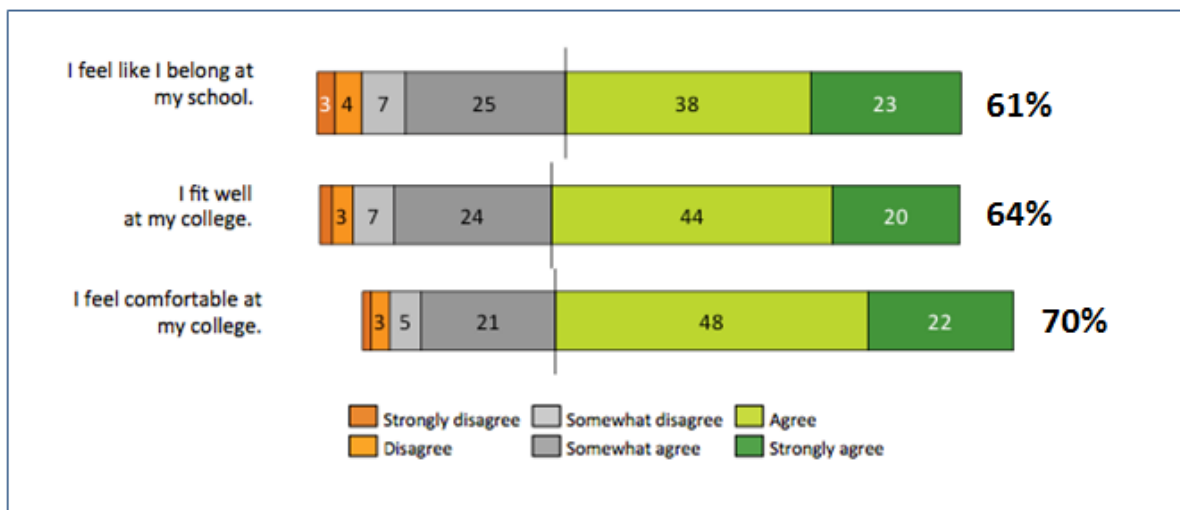
#### **Survey methods and respondent demographics**

- In the spring of 2017, the KIPP Foundation, using the survey measures developed by the researchers at the College Transition Collaborative (CTC),<sup>vii</sup> heard from 3,000 KIPP alumni in college through an electronic survey we sent over email. (We define a KIPP alumnus/a as any student who completed 8th grade at a KIPP middle school, or 12th grade at a KIPP high school.)
- The data in this 2017 Alumni Survey includes all responses by survey respondents; not all respondents answered every question.
- KIPP students, and therefore KIPP alumni, are predominantly students of color and the majority come from low-income families. Ninety five percent of KIPP students are African American or Latino, and nearly 90 percent qualify for federal free or reduced-price lunch.
- KIPP alumni are enrolled at a wide range of colleges and universities, from selective private schools to large state universities to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and more.
- Alumni responded from all 29 KIPP regions across our network with alumni old enough to attend college, representing students who attended KIPP schools in 19 states and Washington, DC. (Full list in appendix.)

## KIPP Alumni Survey Findings

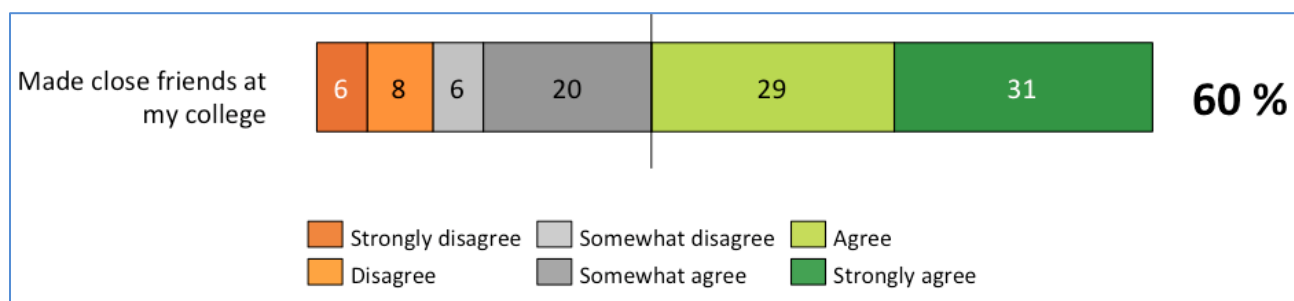
### 1. The majority of KIPP alumni reported feeling a sense of belonging in college.

- Among KIPP alumni survey respondents, 61 percent reported feeling like they belong at their school, 64 percent reported fitting in at their college, and 70 percent reported feeling comfortable at their college.



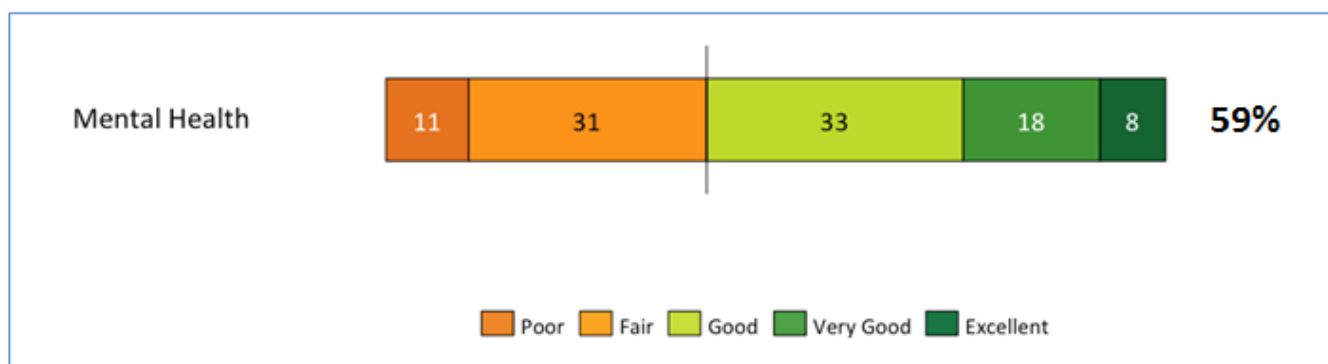
### 2. The majority of KIPP alumni reported having made friends in college.

- 60 percent of KIPP alumni survey respondents reported that they have close friends in college.

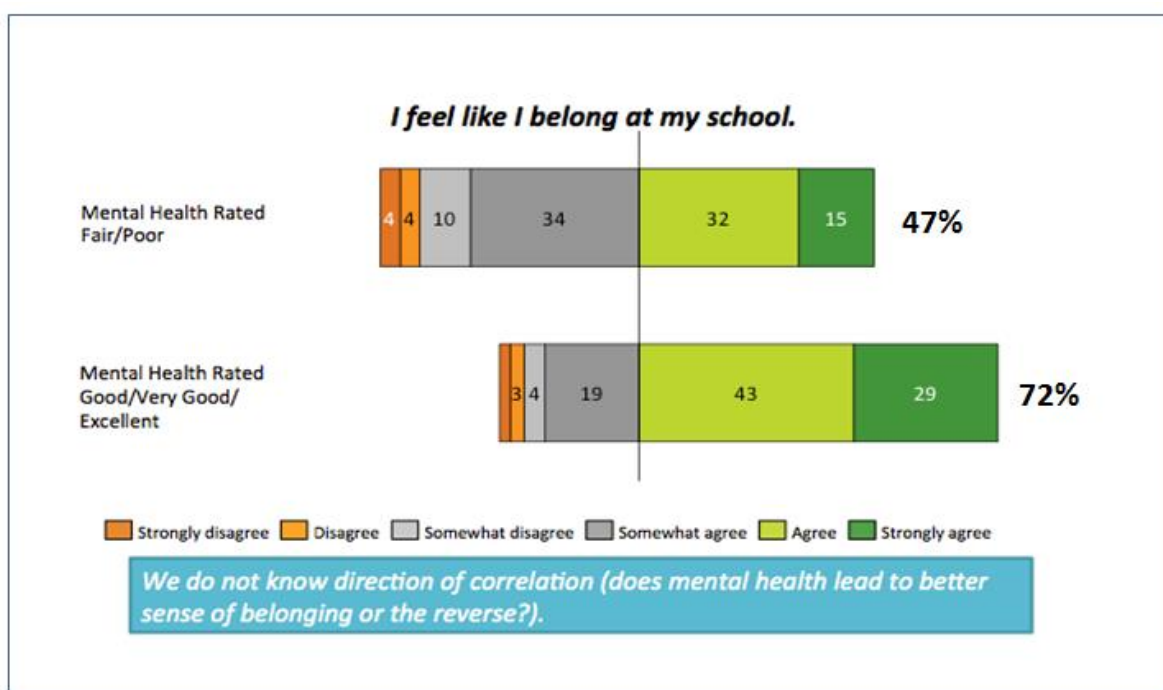


### 3. There's a connection between sense of belonging and mental health for KIPP alumni.

- 59 percent of KIPP alumni survey respondents reported having good, very good, or excellent mental health.

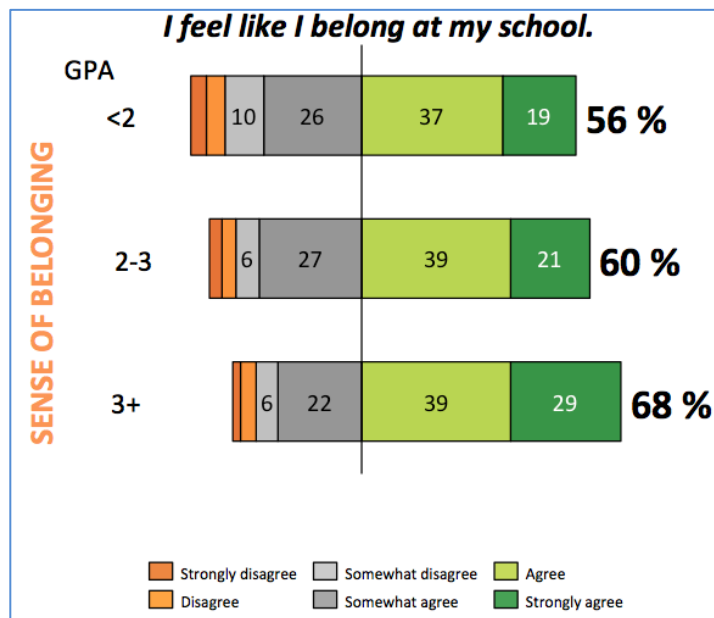


- Among KIPP alumni survey respondents, we found an association between a sense of belonging and indicators of mental health. KIPP alumni who reported their mental health was good, very good, or excellent had a higher sense of belonging (72 percent) than those who reported their mental health as fair or poor (47 percent).



#### 4. KIPP alumni who reported higher GPAs also reported a stronger sense of belonging.

- Among KIPP alumni survey respondents, only 56 percent of students who reported a GPA of two or below also reported feeling a sense of belonging on campus.
- This is contrasted with KIPP alumni who reported a GPA of three or above; 68 percent of these higher-achieving students reported feeling a sense of belonging.

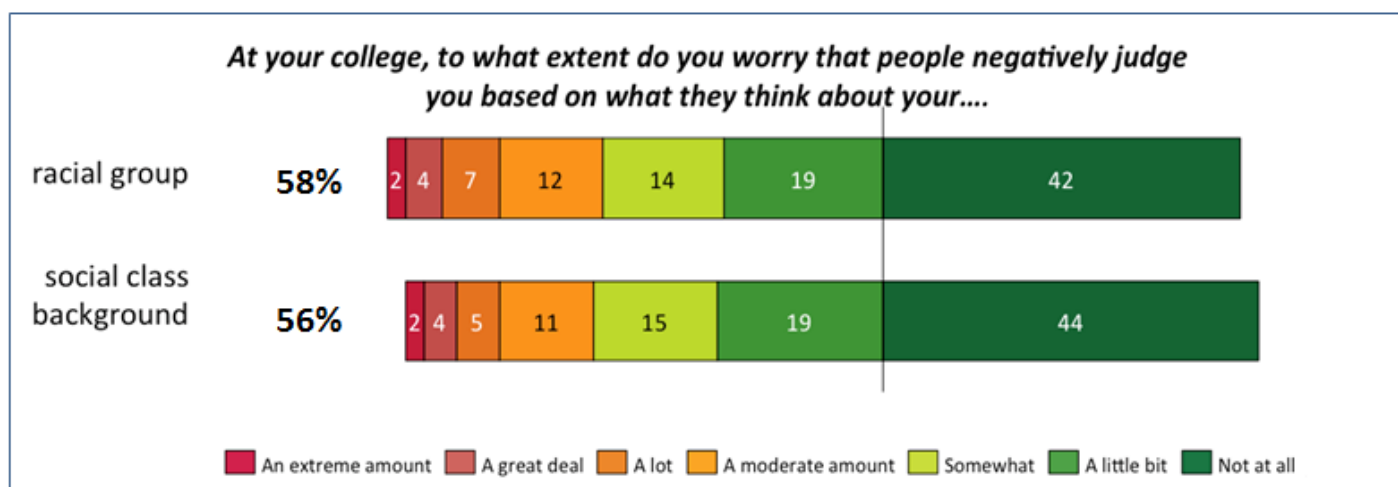


**5. Racial and ethnic identity matter for KIPP alumni, and many reported fearing that their racial and economic background may impact the way others perceive them.**

- Among KIPP alumni survey respondents, 89 percent reported that their racial/ethnic identity is an important part of who they are.

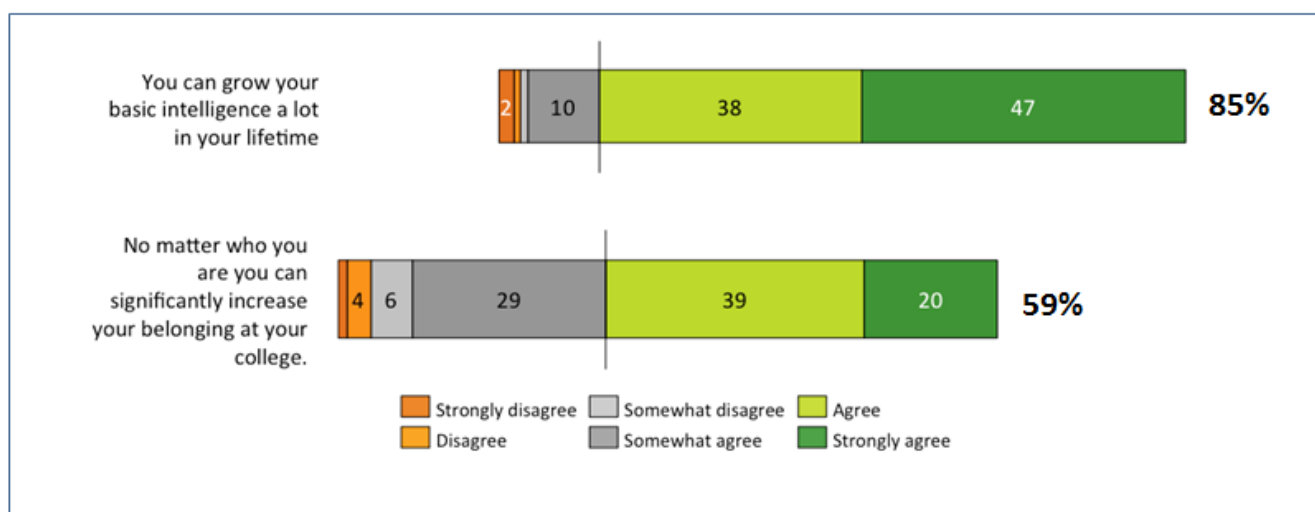


- Among KIPP alumni survey respondents, 58 percent reported feeling negatively judged by others based on their racial group, and 56 percent reported feeling negatively judged by others based on their social class background.



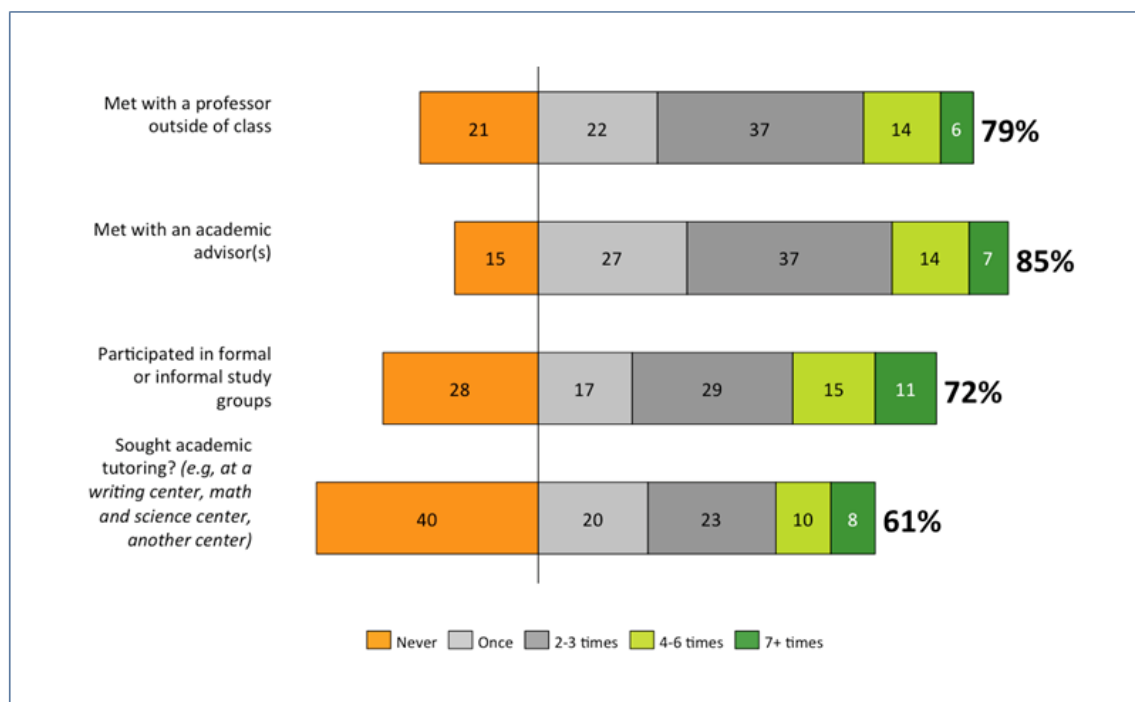
6. In a question on ‘growth mindset,’ the vast majority of KIPP alumni reported that they believe that intelligence can grow; a smaller majority reported that they believe belonging can grow.

- Among KIPP alumni survey respondents, 85 percent reported feeling that they could grow their intelligence, while 59 percent reported feeling that they could grow their sense of belonging.



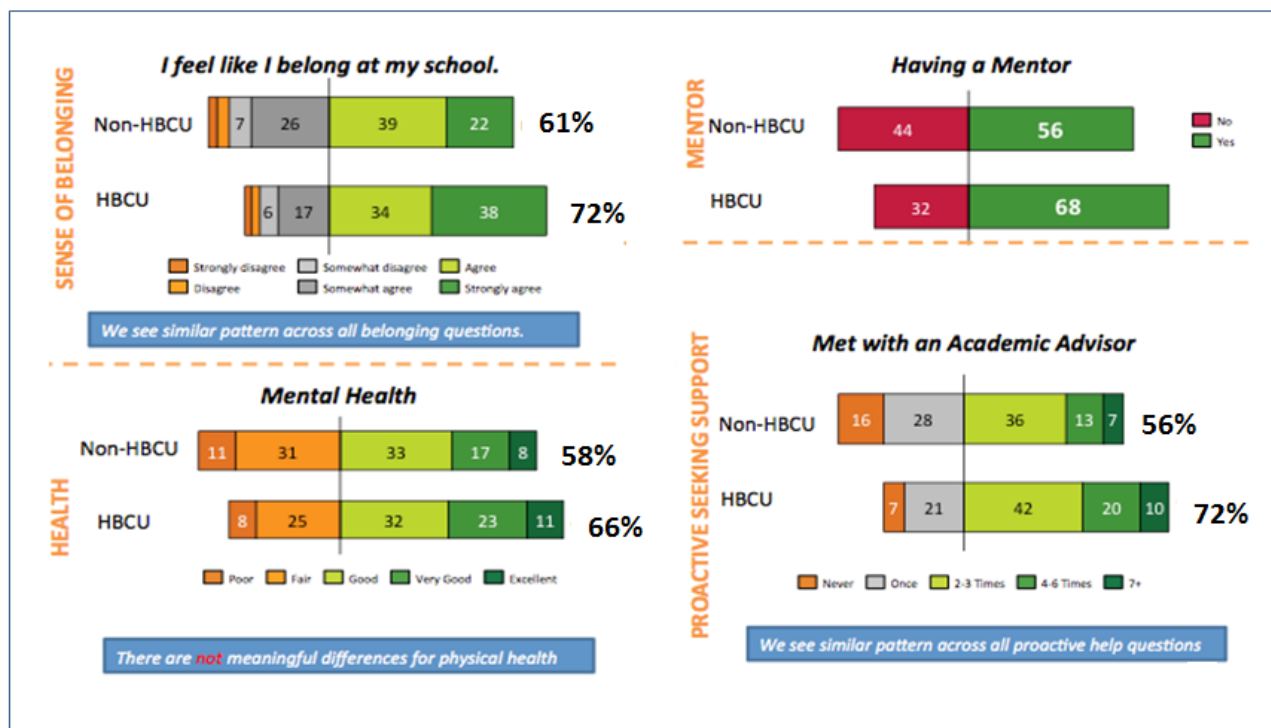
7. The vast majority of KIPP alumni reported seeking academic support from peers and instructors.

- Among KIPP alumni survey respondents, 79 percent reported having met with a professor one or more times, 85 percent reported having met with an academic advisor one or more times, and 72 percent reported participating in a formal or informal study group one or more times.



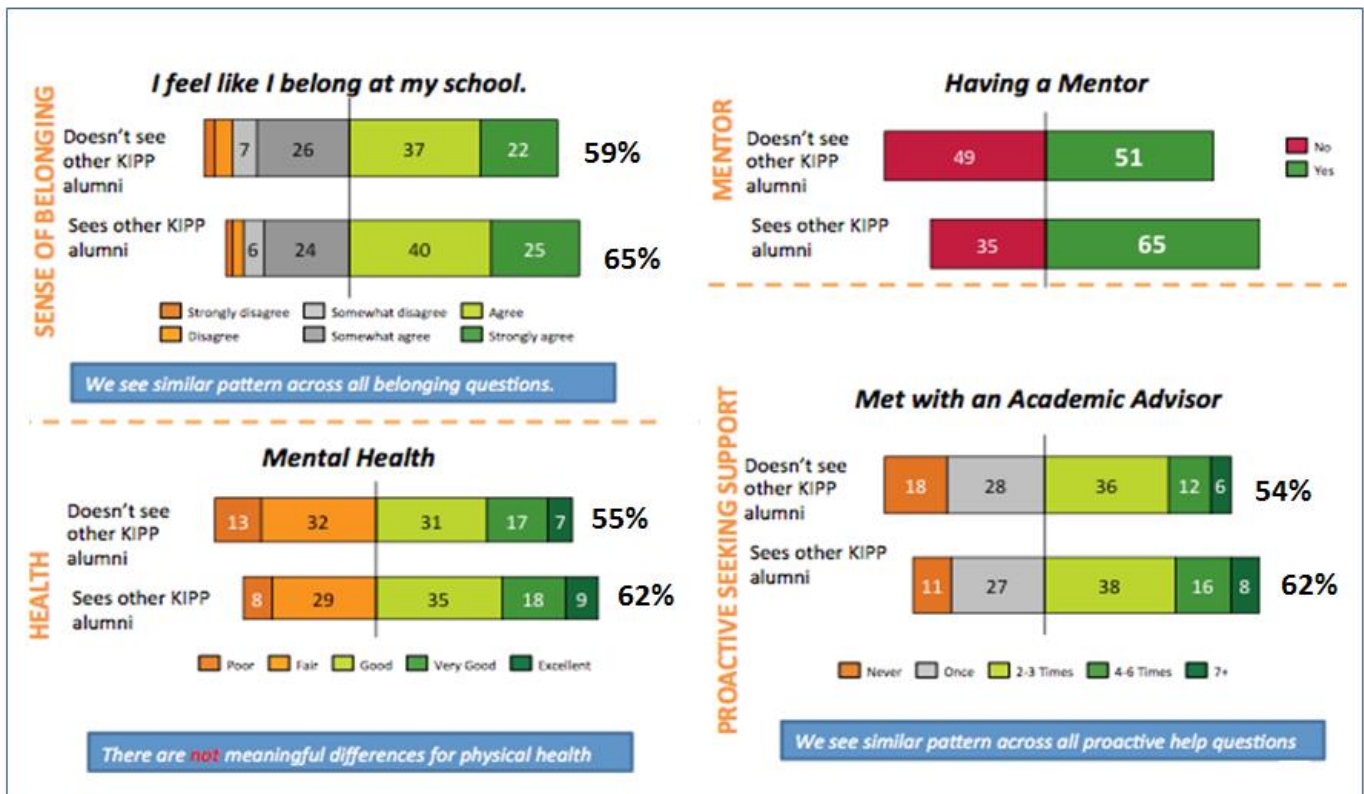
**8. KIPP alumni attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were more likely to report a higher sense of belonging and other positive indicators than KIPP alumni attending non-HBCUs.**

- KIPP alumni survey respondents attending HBCUs were more likely to report a higher sense of belonging, better mental health, and seeking certain academic supports than KIPP alumni survey respondents attending non-HBCUs.



9. KIPP alumni who reported seeing other KIPP alumni on campus were more likely to report a higher sense of belonging and other positive indicators than KIPP alumni who reported not seeing other KIPP alumni.

- KIPP alumni survey respondents who reported seeing other KIPP alumni on campus were more likely to report a higher sense of belonging, better mental health, and seeking certain academic supports than KIPP alumni survey respondents who report not seeing other KIPP alumni.



## What can we do at KIPP?

We are always asking how we can better prepare our students for college. Four key areas where KIPP is working to improve sense of belonging, identity and mental health are:

1. **Helping KIPP students anticipate the challenges of belonging and identity:**
  - We will bolster our support for KIPP students before they leave high school to build a sense of belonging, and better connect KIPP alumni on college campuses so our students know they are not alone when they face challenges.
  - We are working to better prepare our students to seek academic and emotional support once they're on campus.
  - Given our findings that students thrive when they see other KIPP alumni, we are working to facilitate connections among KIPP alumni – both in-person and virtual – that attend the same

college or university.

**2. Helping KIPP students identify their passion, purpose, and plan before college:**

- As part of the college selection process, KIPP Through College counselors help students identify their passion, purpose, and plan. This includes helping them figure out what sparks their drive, why they want to be in college, and the field of study they want to pursue.
- Drawing on the benchmarks we use to assess student progress towards identifying their passion, purpose, and plan, we are developing interventions for those who are struggling or need more support.

**3. Building on existing KIPP college partnerships:**

- At KIPP, we have over 90 college partners nationwide who have made a commitment to take a leadership role in identifying structures and supports to improve persistence and graduation rates for first-generation college students.
- By sharing our alumni survey results with our college partners, we hope to enlist their help in better supporting KIPP alumni (and all students) to build a stronger sense of belonging, identity, and mental health. We will also serve as a conduit for sharing best practices across universities.
- We will continue to work to establish cohort communities of KIPP alumni and other first-generation college students at our college partner campuses.

**4. Learning from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs):**

- From our survey, it is clear that KIPP alumni at HBCUs are experiencing a stronger sense of belonging and positive identity than the average for all KIPP alumni.
- Based on these findings, KIPP will work with HBCUs to gain insight about how these colleges and universities affirm identity and sense of belonging for KIPP alumni.
- Our goal is to help replicate strategies deployed by HBCUs in our work with KIPP students both while they are in high school and enrolled in college, and to help spread these strategies to other colleges and universities, particularly those that are KIPP college partners.

## **What Can Universities Do?**

KIPP is grateful for the partnership of many colleges and universities nationwide who share our mission of improving graduation rates for KIPP alumni and other under-represented students. In August 2017, we brought together these partners at our annual KIPP School Summit, where we discussed how a sense of belonging, among other factors, can help KIPP alumni complete college.

Based on the 2017 alumni survey results, there are **five steps** we believe colleges and universities can take to help KIPP alumni and students like them strengthen their sense of belonging, identity, and mental health:

**1. Bolster or create more targeted support for first-generation college students before they**

**matriculate:** Programs such as Summer Bridge or other pre-college connections can help build community for students. They also provide clarity on how to access the resources that already exist on campus for both academic and emotional support. Colleges should foster these programs to help students feel a sense of community before they arrive on campus. HBCUs do particularly strong work with these programs, and other schools can learn from their efforts.

2. **Continue to increase the diversity of faculty and staff:** Colleges should intentionally recruit faculty and staff who were themselves first-generation college students. These faculty and staff can serve as powerful mentors or presenters at events for first-generation college students.
3. **Make it easier for students to access academic and social supports on campus:** Colleges can make it easier for students to connect with the services that already exist on campus—for instance, providing office hours and tutoring at flexible hours for students with jobs. They can also frame their resources in inclusive, inviting ways. Additionally, colleges should work to break the stigma students feel about seeking support for mental health in particular, to create a culture where students feel empowered to advocate for themselves and one another on campus.
4. **Seek out student voices and create spaces for students to share their experiences around race and identity:** We know students do better academically and report stronger mental health when they feel a positive connection to their racial and ethnic identities. Universities should be in dialogue with first-generation college students, students of color, and students from low-income families. By getting student input on what's working and what's not, schools can strengthen the support that exists and provide opportunities for new interventions.
5. **Conduct and publicize annual surveys on college students' sense of belonging:** Colleges already share data on a host of indicators. Given that a sense of belonging is associated with higher achievement and better mental health, we believe colleges and universities should annually survey students on this topic and share the data with the public.

**APPENDIX: KIPP regions with alumni in college who were surveyed in 2017**

- |                            |                   |
|----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Albany                  | 16. Los Angeles   |
| 2. Austin                  | 17. Massachusetts |
| 3. Baltimore               | 18. Memphis       |
| 4. Bay Area                | 19. Metro Atlanta |
| 5. Charlotte               | 20. Minnesota     |
| 6. Chicago                 | 21. Nashville     |
| 7. Colorado                | 22. New Jersey    |
| 8. Columbus                | 23. New Orleans   |
| 9. Dallas Fort Worth       | 24. New York City |
| 10. Washington, DC         | 25. Oklahoma City |
| 11. Delta                  | 26. Philadelphia  |
| 12. Eastern North Carolina | 27. San Antonio   |
| 13. Houston                | 28. San Diego     |
| 14. Indianapolis           | 29. Tulsa         |
| 15. Kansas City            |                   |

## FOOTNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine and commissioned by the National Science Foundation (2017). Supporting Students' College Success: The Role of Assessment of Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Competencies.

<sup>ii</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine and commissioned by the National Science Foundation (2017).

<sup>iii</sup> Kuh, G. D.; Kinzie, J.; Buckley, J. A.; Bridges, B. K.; & Hayek, J. C. (2006). What matters to student success: A review of the literature. In a commissioned report for the national symposium on postsecondary student success: Spearheading a dialogue on student success. National Post Secondary Education Cooperative. Retrieved from: [https://nces.ed.gov/npec/pdf/kuh\\_team\\_report.pdf](https://nces.ed.gov/npec/pdf/kuh_team_report.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Yeager, D. S. & Walton, G. (2011). Social-psychological interventions in education: They're not magic. *Review of Educational Research*, 81, 267-301.

<sup>v</sup> Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2011). A brief social-belonging intervention improves academic and health outcomes of minority students. *Science*, 331, 1447-1451.

<sup>vi</sup> Stephens, N.M., Hamedani, M.D., and Destin, M. (2014). Closing the social-class achievement gap: A difference-education intervention improves first-generation students' academic performance and all students' college transition. *Psychological Science*, 25(4), 943-953.

<sup>vii</sup> <http://collegetransitioncollaborative.org/>