



# BetterGrads

## Program Brochure

### What is BetterGrads?

[BetterGrads](#) transforms latent alumni networks into active support networks for under-served schools. We equip students and administrators with the tools they need to tap into the knowledge, connections, and fundraising potential of past graduates and other local professional networks in order to help students succeed in college, career, and personally.

Since our founding in 2009, BetterGrads has served over 2000 high school students through mentoring, college Q&A panels, and our [College 101 Blog](#). BetterGrads is an education startup currently based in the San Francisco Bay Area.

### What is the BetterGrads Program?

The BetterGrads Program connects students at under-served high schools to recent alumni (college students and young professionals) and local professionals who support their college and career-going aspirations as on- and offline mentors. The goal of the program is threefold:

1. To provide high school students with excellent college advising, preparation resources, and peer support from a ready-source of knowledgeable mentors;
2. To cultivate sustainable college-going cultures and career networks at overstretched, under-resourced high schools; and
3. To develop a platform that students, counselors, and alumni themselves can use to build and benefit from the high school's alumni network and, more broadly, other potential professional support networks and resources that are embedded in the local community.

By harnessing the knowledge and connections of alumni and local professional networks (such as company networks and college networks, philanthropists, high net-worth individuals, well-connected parents, and young professionals working in the area), we offer schools a mechanism by which to benefit from their own latent resources. Whereas other organizations try to create social and human capital where it does not exist, we seek to reinvest capital where it began.

Our mentors help high school student mentees understand what it takes to get to college and thrive. Over the course of their mentoring relationship, we encourage program participants to work through a flexible curriculum that covers the ins-and-outs of college—SATs, financial aid, transitions, classes and majors, choosing a college, college essays and admissions, scholarship applications, study habits, clubs and activities, internships, careers, and more.

Each program cycle runs for one year. At the conclusion of a program cycle, mentees will have crafted a personal college and career plan with their mentor that serves as a roadmap for helping them reach their education and career goals. They will be able to answer the following questions:

- Why is it worthwhile for me to go to college?
- How can I afford a college education?
- What do I need to do to prepare for admissions and matriculation?
- How can I make the most of my college experience?

Mentors take part in a training session overview of the program's basic curriculum, expectations, and the material in this brochure. Mentors receive ongoing support from BetterGrads' national team and have access to a reference library of over 230 articles on all aspects of college, written by college students and young professionals and located on our website, [bettergrads.org](http://bettergrads.org). Our curriculum was designed by mentees, mentors, school officials, and BetterGrads staff to reflect the college application and admission cycle and the academic calendar. The curriculum includes a list of conversation topics and related activities each month.

It should be noted that our mentors are *not* authoritative experts on college admissions or financial aid. Students should consult college admissions and financial aid officers with specific questions. Our mentors are college students and young professionals who went to the high school and/or live/work in the area. We believe they are equipped to offer a valuable perspective to high school students based on their near-to-peer status and success. As such, we keep the program curriculum *loose* and the training to a *minimum*.

## Program Overview

Throughout the course of the program, mentors and mentees engage each other through regular online and offline communications, including:

- At least one e-mail exchange per week;**
- At least one phone call or video chat per month;**
- At least one school site visit per year (*preferred, but not required*);**
- At least one group meeting per month (two for mentees, *see below*).**

**Mentees are expected to attend at least one monthly group meeting.** The goal of the group meetings are to discuss the program and curriculum, share progress on activities, and brainstorm ways to share what they are learning with the wider campus community. Mentees in this program demonstrate leadership by stepping up and committing to college success, and should see

themselves as *mentors* for their classmates. The group meetings should be organized by mentees. We request that someone take notes at each meeting to share with the BetterGrads team.

**Mentees are welcome to organize themselves as they see fit.** We suggest that they consider the fine example set by the students in our pilot mentoring program at Granada High School (Livermore, CA). These mentees formed a club for the mentoring program, outlined expectations of program participants in a constitution, elected officers, organized on-campus events, and held bi-monthly meetings. The club was called CPC2012, short for the College Prep Club 2012, with the year indicating when members will graduate from high school and enroll in college.

**An on-site program coordinator, usually a college/career counselor or teacher, is required.**

**All program participants are expected to call into a monthly group conference call.** The goal of the monthly session is to hold a Q&A session about the curriculum and the month's activity and to share the latest updates on the program. In addition to the conference call, mentors and mentees regularly communicate with each other as a group through three Google Groups (one for mentors only, one for mentees only, and one for all program participants at the school).

**The average time commitment for this program is about 30–60 minutes per week.** All participants are expected to remain active for the entire duration of at least one program cycle (one year). During summers, the program continues without the required in-person meetings.

**As an additional resource for mentees and mentors,** BetterGrads has made available its complete inventory of over 230 college-related articles and blog entries at its website, [bettergrads.org](http://bettergrads.org). Articles were written by college students and young professionals and constitute a *College 101* resource library available for all BetterGrads Program participants.

**Each mentor is assigned one mentee of the same gender.** When possible, efforts will be made to match pairs based on other factors as well (e.g., career goals, academic interests, background).

**Upon completion of a program cycle (one year),** mentors and mentees in good standing are enrolled in the BetterGrads Program alumni network and are eligible to continue with the program. We encourage mentors and mentees to continue their participation in the program beyond one program cycle. *Ideally, every mentor-mentee relationship will last at least until the mentee enrolls in college.* We can support relationships to this point, and thereafter encourage lifelong friendships. Once a mentee enrolls in college, he or she is invited to serve as a mentor.

**There are no fixed fees associated with this program,** but there are many service-related costs. We partner with high schools to enlist the support of the wider community for the maintenance and growth of the program **and** we ask mentors and mentees to fundraise to help us cover costs (we encourage a target of \$100 per program participant per year). We welcome volunteering, in-kind resources, referrals, and donations from parents, teachers, businesses, and alumni.

## Privacy and Safety

The privacy and safety of our mentees and mentors is a top priority. All mentors must undergo mandatory online criminal background checks and identity checks before they are eligible to be paired with a mentee. Regular check-ins by the on-site program coordinator, agreement forms (mentor, mentee, and parent/guardian), and group activities are elements of our program intended to protect the privacy and safety of all program participants.

To ensure the comfort and well-being of all program participants and to provide recourse should any inappropriate behavior occur, the following additional measures have been implemented:

- Mentors and mentees may not meet outside of the school-site without the supervision of school staff or the permission of school staff and at least one other program participant present. All off-campus meetings must occur in a public location (restaurant, cafe, etc.).
- We expect mentors and mentees to behave appropriately and use common sense in all interactions, in-person and online, via text, telephone call, email, instant message, and video chat. Participants in this program may request that some of their personal contact information not be shared with their mentor/mentee (sharing an email address is necessary).
- Mentors must agree to release background check status to BetterGrads and its affiliates. We maintain confidentiality of the results. By signing and returning the Mentor Agreement Form, mentors indicate that they agree to submit to all safety standards to be considered for this program, including additional interviews and reference checks as requested.
- Mentees must submit the online Mentee Agreement Form and their parent / legal guardian must return or submit the Parent / Legal Guardian Consent Form to participate in this program.
- All program participants are required to follow the Emergency Protocols and Non-Emergency Protocols to handle serious and life-threatening situations. Furthermore, any situation or behavior that is inappropriate or questionable should be reported immediately to the on-site program coordinator and the directors of BetterGrads.
- We reserve the right to refuse any applicant for this program. We operate on a zero tolerance policy: any program participant that initiates or engages in inappropriate or objectionable behavior deemed unfitting of a mentor or mentee is subject to expulsion from the program, and possible further disciplinary action.

## Emergency and Non-Emergency Protocols

In general, mentors **must** notify authorities if:

1. A mentee is being harmed in any way;
2. A mentee is harming others in any way;
3. A mentee is going to harm him or herself in any way.

We advise mentors and mentees to use common sense on how to respond to a situation and determine its severity. For example: a mentee's idle chat about being frustrated with a parent would probably not be a reason to call for help; a mentee's idle chat about contemplating suicide due to their frustration would be a reason to report the incident and take further actions as appropriate to the situation. If in doubt, the mentor or mentee should error on the side of caution by asking for help, reporting the incident, and/or contacting the authorities. Confidentiality and trust are important, but the health and safety of program participants are the top priorities.

In the following section, the terms "Emergency" and "Non-Emergency" refer to whether the matter is of *immediate urgency* or not, and is to be used as a rough guide only. Non-Emergency situations can be very serious and potentially life-threatening, and should be dealt with swiftly.

### **Protocol for Emergency Situations:**

*Examples: suicide attempt / threats, alcohol / drug overdose, imminent life-threatening situation*

**Step 1:** Call 911 (if necessary).

**Step 2:** Contact the relevant emergency contact organization:

- The US National Suicide and Crisis Hotlines
  - o <http://suicidehotlines.com/national.html> (helpful list of crisis support hotlines)
  - o 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433) – toll-free, 24 / 7
  - o 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) – toll-free, 24 / 7
- *(record information on local suicide and crisis intervention hotlines / centers here)*
  - o

**Step 3:** Report the incident as soon as possible to the on-site program coordinator and the directors of BetterGrads.

### **Protocol for Non-Emergency Situations:**

*Examples: suicide talk / ideation, anything to do with abuse, depression, alcohol / drug problem*

**Step 1:** Listen empathically to the person and help them feel reassured.

**Step 2:** Ask questions to gain intelligence about the situation (who, where, what circumstances).

**Step 3:** Make contact with a counseling service:

- *(record information on the counseling service numbers at the partner high school here)*
  - o
- *(record information on local family and teenage counseling hotlines / centers here)*
  - o

**Step 4:** Ask the person to contact the counseling service provider directly.

**Step 5:** Report the incident as soon as possible to the on-site program coordinator and the directors of BetterGrads.

## **Program Contacts**

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