

Research Brief

Participation Workgroup

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OPENING DOORS TO COLLEGE OPPORTUNITY

Overview

The lack of family experience with higher education, the often challenging maze of application, financial aid, and other “systems” related to education, historic and current barriers to opportunity due to race and income, and the simple cultural void between many young adults’ lives and that of the higher education world challenge the access to and the success of realizing a postsecondary degree.

There is a family of approaches—many proven successful, others newly emerging—to better connect the young adults aspiring to go to college with the reality of the college experience and to help them successfully realize the taking of this important step. Michigan has a number of initiatives at work currently to bridge the cultural and physical disconnect between K–12 and higher education.

General Strategies

The work group is looking at how to create partnerships between K–12, higher education institutions, and other community institutions that will increase aspirations and successful connection and navigation of the system to postsecondary education. Foster university/college and community college partnerships with “at-risk” school districts, proactively reaching out to support the participation and success of historically underrepresented racial minorities in higher education. Foster community-based partnerships around the goal of dramatically increasing participation in higher education. State leadership can use the bully pulpit as well as promote specific policies that set goals and encourage active public/private, university/community collaborations to boost participation in higher education.

Michigan-Specific Strategies at Work

1. College Goal

The College Goal program is sponsored by the Michigan-based organization *Partnership for Learning* with the goal of increasing the percentage of students who succeed in achieving a postsecondary degree. To accomplish this goal, *Partnership for Learning* has adopted the strategy of providing collaborative information and services for families, communities, and schools to help more students take earlier steps to succeed in college and careers. Imbedded in this overarching strategy are three objectives:

- a. Boost the percentage of families that take **early preparation steps** starting at birth, such as saving for college and careers, performing learning activities in their home and community, building real partnerships with educators, taking challenging course work, and accessing financial aid.
- b. Increase the percentage of students who **access financial aid** by February of their senior year.
- c. Create **community collaborations** that make the road to college easier to follow, particularly for children whose parents haven’t achieved the degree themselves.

2. *King-Chávez-Parks Initiative*

The King-Chávez-Parks Initiative is a program sponsored by the Michigan Department of Education. The goal of the King-Chávez-Parks Initiative is to achieve parity in the number of baccalaureate, graduate, and doctoral degrees awarded to Michigan students traditionally under-represented in higher education. In order to accomplish this goal, six strategic initiatives have been implemented, which include:

- a. The **Future Faculty Program** supports the development of a diverse faculty pool for Michigan's postsecondary system by providing stipends for underrepresented ethnic minority graduate students pursuing college teaching careers;
- b. The **College Day Program** introduces secondary students, in grades 6–11, and their parents to university campuses and college preparatory information, knowledge and skills;
- c. The **Select Student Support Services (4-S) Program** is a competitive grant program which supports universities in the development and institutionalization of retention programs for academically and economically disadvantaged students;
- d. The **Michigan College/University Partnership (MICUP) Program** is a competitive grant program which increases the number of minority transfer students through the funding of pilot transfer programs between community colleges and public universities;
- e. The **Visiting Professors Program** assists universities in exposing students to a diversity of scholars; and
- f. The **Educator Development Program** provides grants to increase minority completion of K–12 teacher education.

For more detailed information on this program, please refer to the document included with this report: *2003 Marketing and Public Relations Outreach Report, King-Chávez-Parks Initiative, Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth*

3. *GEAR UP Michigan*

GEAR UP Michigan (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) targets the students, families, teachers, and counselors in major urban areas in Michigan. The goal of **GEAR UP Michigan** is to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and to succeed in postsecondary education. To accomplish this goal, the program has implemented the following strategies:

- a. Build on the multitude of career education programs available through career development and provide services to 3,360 students in 22 middle schools. Students receive academic counseling, a detailed educational development plan, after-school tutoring, and career and college preparation assistance. They are encouraged to participate in on-campus college enrichment programs. Emphasis is placed on connecting future careers with the academic skills needed to be successful.
- b. Provide teachers and counselors with intensive professional development opportunities to help them strengthen their curriculum and interconnect career decision making with future college choices.

- c. Link with numerous scholarships enacted by the state legislature including the Merit Award, PASS scholarship, Tuition Incentive Program, and others to extend full scholarships to qualifying students. The Michigan Department of Treasury provides parents, students, and counselors with in-depth financial aid information to plan for future college costs.
- d. Promote new attitudes that encourage students to realize their full potential regardless of their economic conditions. (http://www.michigan.gov/mdcd/0,1607,7-122-1680_2735-95723--,00.html)

At Central Michigan University, the **GEAR UP** Program is targeting Flint's Holmes Middle School, Longfellow Middle School, McKinley Middle School, and Northern High School to offer students the academic skills, information, and encouragement they need to graduate and go on to college prepared to succeed. (<http://www.diversity.cmich.edu/Gearup/>)

There are additional approaches and a number of promising practices from Michigan and the national arena to consider as well.

- **Intervention Programs for At-Risk Youth**—Becoming academically prepared for the rigors of college is one challenge, but preparing for the social adjustments, applying to college, finding financial aid, visiting schools, and developing good habits for providing structure to a daily routine are among some of the challenges students face beyond the classroom. There are intervention programs designed to meet the needs of a variety of students at differing levels of need. For example, the Center for Talented Youth at Johns Hopkins University targets high-achieving and high-potential youth, whereas Prep for Prep in New York City works primarily with high-potential minority youth in Catholic prep schools. Each program exists for a different audience and addresses unique concerns, but they are formulated around a common premise: more can be done to assist all students to be better prepared for college. **The Gateway to College**[®] program, begun at Portland Community College, is a program for at-risk youth. A version of the program at Montgomery College serves at-risk youth, 16 to 20 years old, who have stopped attending Montgomery County Public High Schools and for whom high school completion is at risk. The program gives students the opportunity to earn a high school diploma while transitioning to a college campus. Students may simultaneously accumulate high school and college credits, earning their high school diploma while progressing toward an associate degree or certificate.¹
- **One on One Mentoring Program**—In Milwaukee, Wisconsin the YMCA conducts a middle school program that is geared toward preparing kids for high school who will in turn be well equipped to pursue college. Kids who successfully complete the program often continue on to the Sponsor-A-Scholar program that helps transition high school students into college. During the mentoring program, students are assigned an adult who assists them as they develop effective study skills, answers questions about college and careers, and provides a positive adult role model for kids who are looking for guidance. The program is designed to keep students on the right

¹ For more information visit <http://montgomerycollege.edu/gatewaytocollege/>

track and develop positive habits to succeed in high school. The MDRC Social Policy Research organization considers several models similar to One on One that target a middle range of at-risk youth, including **Big Brothers/Big Sisters** and the **Quantum Opportunity Program (QOP)**, that provide meaningful mentoring, encouragement, and support coupled with after-school activities, academic support, and participation in community service (Ivry & Doolittle, 2003). These are local intervention strategies that are tailored to meet the specific needs of a given community.

- **College/Community Partnerships**—A number of well-designed intervention programs take place on college campuses or are sponsored by colleges in local communities. Perhaps the largest and most well established of these programs is the nationwide **Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)**. EOP programs can be found on hundreds of campuses around the country and are specifically geared toward serving underrepresented minority and low-SES students, including first-generation students. Most of these programs include a multiweek summer academic program hosted on campus and include some form of financial incentive for successful participation such as scholarships. Take, for example, the **Women In Science and Engineering (WISE)** program conducted at the University of Michigan. Like the EOP, WISE is designed to help facilitate the transition to college for a group of students who might not otherwise succeed or thrive. In this case, the program has a particular academic emphasis, recognizing the dire need to attract women to the hard science and engineering fields. Another type of partnership develops as a partnership between the college and a local community. Consider the **ASPIRE** program formerly sponsored by Adrian College. This was a largely successful collaboration between Adrian College and the Methodist Church in Detroit. The program was established to provide promising at-risk students with academic tutoring while in high school and scholarship dollars to attend Adrian College once they successfully earned their diploma. It helped students develop the capacity to attend college, envision themselves on a college campus, and minimize the concern over the cost of attending.