

Governor's Education Summit: April 28, 2009

Breaking through Barriers: Building a Network for College Access & Success

Regional Breakout Session MACOMB/ST. CLAIR

Part II: Community Assets and Gaps

- Groups in community that could participate in coalition?
 - Macomb County does not have an organized effort yet for college access. There are groups and schools making good efforts but not central initiative.
 - St. Clair County found it's a big enough challenge that you do need everyone on board.
 - Macomb falls under SE Michigan Community Foundation. They can be conveners/implementers – already familiar with the organizations out there.
 - Perhaps Macomb County Chamber could also help.
 - St. Clair EDA got involved because the business community recognized need for educated workforce. You do need an organization to get started on access initiatives – perhaps having non-school group as lead can better push college access.
 - Employers are one stakeholder here – what are the needs for the future resources?
 - To get more kids to go, we must bring more people in to the room – not just education folks. Must include MIWorks! and faith-based groups.
 - With the economic situation, college access has to be a community initiative. Cherry Commission emphasized connection between K-12 and college, but often this is lacking.
 - Student participation: Student voices are missing in professional development. Maybe students could be more involved. They are competent and tech-savvy. But they often don't have a voice. Involve kids in collaborative efforts.
 - Parent participation: Likewise, parents are a missing component. Parental support is crucial to deciding whether to go to college, where to go, and what to major in. But parents aren't always asked for input.
- What resources are needed?
 - There are no Kalamazoo Promise funders, but fewer than 10% of TIP-eligible students are actually using it. Hundreds of thousands of dollars of scholarships are left on the table in St. Clair County.
 - With TIP, students must apply before leaving high school so partnerships with middle schools is important.
- Current obstacles and solutions?
 - Effort should not just include access to college, but should also make sure students at Macomb Community College are college-ready and have a

career focus. St. Clair has camp, testing to help get students aware of what's needed to be college-ready.

- Compass Test as an assessment is not helpful if you take it 48 hours before enrolling – students should take it in the 10th grade so students won't need remedial work. Some students don't take the test seriously because they weren't planning on college. They often pick up this attitude from college. In St. Clair 12% of population has four-year degrees.
- Transportation is a problem in Macomb – getting to 12 mile campus.
- With a diverse group of people looking at the problem, you can find the gaps in college access sooner than if just schools are looking at it. There is a lack of communication between businesses and schools.
- St. Clair County Community College can look at partnering with community, not just at their own stats. Kindergarteners will work in jobs that don't exist yet. We might not know which jobs will be out there but we can provide key skills.
- There are some very inexpensive interventions we can take – like just talking more about college.
- A TIP letter in 6th grade seems irrelevant – it gets thrown away.
- If you are told college is expensive, you aren't going to think you can go if you are poor. Friends, other community members help encourage you to go.
- Big 3 line jobs aren't coming back. But teachers have a huge impact on student achievement – look at the schools Kati talked about at lunch. Times were different and college wasn't essential back in the day. Schools want to work with the colleges – school administrators can do it but the efforts are being put on the kids.

➤ Current Gaps?

- College Visit Days: Students don't understand how much control they have in college. It is not just a repeat of high school. College visit days could help with this.
- Applications/FAFSA: Filling out the FAFSA is a simple step that makes it more likely that students will go to college. It would be great to have a program that had everyone fill out the application. Hand-holding with applicants is hard, and it's very different with online applications. K-12 can help with this, but there also needs to be a simpler process. Must work from both ends.
- Mindset/Culture Shift: We need to change mindset/culture at an earlier point – need to say that college is practical for everyone. Focus on 1st generation college students.
- Counselors: High school counselor wishes she had 5 days to work on career development. Lots of skills still needed to enter into a career.
- Money IS an issue, but the community has more resources than they thought. The figure for sending anyone in St. Clair to community college – for providing last dollar scholarship – isn't as overwhelming. People from St. Clair go, but they don't come back after graduation.

➤ Current Assets?

- New Leadership: There is an opportunity with new leadership at both community colleges. The MCC president emphasizes that community colleges are gateways to opportunities. They will sponsor programs that provide transportation, mentoring, and even lunches.
- Anecdote of PhD student – An Associate’s Degree was the building block.
- There are an average of 90-120 attendance at parents, kids, and college events. Parents have an appetite for involvement. And not many of these parents – maybe 25% -- have been to college themselves. Parental encouragement helps students stay on campus.
- St. Clair Community Foundation has pushed TIP but can’t always get into the high schools for financial aid nights. Partnerships have helped get Superintendent buy-in and better luck getting into schools.