

## **Success at Every Step of College and Career Preparation – A Forum Friday, February 5, 2010**

This half-day AYPF forum focused on the urgent need to help students achieve success in college and careers, and highlighted proven strategies that provide such support throughout the education system. The forum was anchored by the findings of the new AYPF publication, *Success at Every Step: How 23 Programs Support Youth on the Path to College and Beyond*, which profiles programs that have been proven effective in helping young people complete high school and be prepared for success in postsecondary education and careers. The event provided an overview of the publication's findings, showcased a variety of programs that support college- and career-readiness, and explored implications for federal and state policy.

### ***Introductory Remarks***

**Representative Chakah Fattah (PA-2)** offered opening remarks about the timeliness of the discussion on college- and career-readiness. He cited data from the US Census showing that youth who attain postsecondary education earn substantially more over their lifetimes than those who do not. Fattah noted the direct alignment of the work in *Success at Every Step* and US Congressional priorities for the upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). He also spoke to his on-going support of the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), one of the 23 featured programs in the AYPF publication.

**Michael Wotorson, Executive Director, Campaign for High School Equity**, provided the keynote presentation for the forum. Wotorson set the context for the forum discussion by painting a picture of the enormity of the crisis that faces so many young people today: a crisis of inequality that threatens the nation's economic and social future and imperils the dreams of individual youth. The crisis is nothing short of the biggest civic rights challenge of the current times,

Wotorson spoke of the historical and economic significance of the current educational achievement gaps that contribute to persistent inequality across different racial and ethnic groups. Citing the US Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* from 1954, he said that today, the vast majority of students of color are still offered substandard education. Such disparities include unequal access to effective teachers, institutions with adequate resources, and integrated schools. Wotorson also shared data on the costs to society of not graduating more students from high school, including increased Medicaid costs and lost tax revenue.

Wotorson stressed the importance of helping students succeed as a way to combat the solidification of a permanent underclass. He urged participants to act on what is known to work to help students succeed as adults in an effort to safeguard the nation's future.

### ***AYPF Presentation on Success at Every Step***

**Betsy Brand, Executive Director, and Sarah Hooker, Program Associate, AYPF**, authors of *Success at Every Step*, shared an overview of the publication. Hooker shared the methodology used in the choosing the included programs, key tenets guiding the work, the main findings of the report, and overall trends in the programmatic and structural elements of the included initiatives. Brand spoke about the publication's logic model that is based on the analysis of the 23 programs and describes the process of preparing youth for postsecondary education, careers, and long-term success.

Hooker described several key components of the research approach used to create *Success at Every Step*. She first defined that when AYPF uses the term “college,” what is meant is a full range of postsecondary learning experiences that will lead to careers that offer family-sustaining wages. In selecting the 23 programs for the publication, AYPF sought programs that had a recent, third-party evaluation and a control or comparison group of students who did not participate in the program. AYPF acknowledged that one limitation in the research base is that many programs do not have the resources to conduct third-party evaluations.

*Success at Every Step* identifies several outcomes across the included programs that demonstrate a positive impact on young people’s preparation for postsecondary success at various stages of their educational, professional, and personal development. Participants in these programs are more likely to be engaged in school, take advanced courses, apply for financial aid, enroll in college, earn postsecondary degrees, and find employment. Specifically, the most common outcomes measured in the compendium can be organized into the following categories:

- Secondary-level academics
- College- and career-planning
- Postsecondary-level academics
- Career-related outcomes
- Developing personal resources (which refers to characteristics of social and emotional development and aspirations)

The most commonly observed findings were observed in middle or high school, where AYPF saw the following:

- Twenty programs improved academic outcomes, such as attendance rates, achievement test scores, course-passing rates, and graduation rates
- Five programs improved planning for college and careers, including indicators of college knowledge, educational aspirations, and applications for financial aid

Additionally, outcomes were observed at the postsecondary level, including:

- Nine programs that improved academic outcomes, including college enrollment rates, type of college attended, improved college grades, credit accrual, and degree completion
- Three programs that improved career-related outcomes, including earnings, employment status, and attainment of a vocational certificate or credential

Furthermore, outcomes related to developing personal resources were also observed for youth of all ages; nine programs demonstrated an impact in this area, including student engagement, effort, self-efficacy, and self-sufficiency; and reduced risky behaviors.

Ultimately, AYPF identified 10 common characteristics, or elements of success, that may contribute to programs’ effectiveness. These elements were grouped into two broad categories:

#### Programmatic Elements of Success

- Rigor and academic support
- Relationships
- College knowledge and access
- Relevance

- Youth-centered programs
- Effective instruction

#### Structural and System-Focused Elements of Success

- Partnerships and cross-systems collaboration
- Strategic use of time
- Leadership and autonomy
- Effective assessment and use of data

Brand described AYPF's Logic Model for College- and Career-Readiness and Success that aims to demonstrate how different components of youth and education programming fit into a comprehensive picture of what it takes to prepare competent young adults. This model assumes that the long-term goal of education is to ensure career success, civic-engagement, and the capacity for lifelong learning for all young people. To achieve this goal, youth need a broad array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal resources, which AYPF termed the Foundation for Learning and Growth. The Logic Model also describes the various types of educational services and supports that young people need in order to develop this foundation, and provides a visual representation of the interconnected roles of the various providers and systems that impact a young person's trajectory in life.

To achieve these goals, youth need supports such as caring role models, academic supports, rigorous curriculum, college and career counseling, work-based learning, early college exposure, comprehensive social services, and scholarships and financial aid. Brand demonstrated that many types of providers can offer such supports, including:

- Families and caregivers
- Schools
- Social and medical service providers
- Community-based organizations
- Private providers of academic support
- Employers
- Institutions of higher education

Brand also emphasized that many effective programs reflect strong collaboration between various institutions and types of providers, in order to comprehensively address the multiple dimensions of youth development.

#### *Panel 1: Discussion on Programs Supporting College- and Career-Readiness*

**Joel Vargas, Program Director, Jobs for the Future**, shared insights on how Early College High Schools (ECHS) blend the high school and college environments for students from groups that are traditionally underrepresented in high education. The goal is to help students graduate with up to two years of transferrable college credit or an associate's degree. By providing college experience, along with extra academic and social support in the context of a small high school, ECHS are a powerful intervention strategy for youth from low-income families by removing academic, financial, and social barriers to college.

The Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI), supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, includes 210 ECHS in 25 states and the District of Columbia, serving nearly 50,000 enrolled students.

Graduates earn an average of 22 college credits. Most ECHS are public schools and about 20% are charter schools. The grade levels vary by school, with some serving only middle school students or having students in grades 9-13, whereas others are ungraded and based on student competency. Some have partnerships with 2-year colleges; others with 4-year colleges. And some are based on college campuses, while others are located close to college campuses and deliver some courses on the high school campus.. There is a heavy concentration of ECHSI schools in California, New York, North Carolina, and Texas. Many schools in these and other states were initiated with the state's own startup funding, beyond or exclusive of ECHSI.

Vargas noted that the ECHS approach aligns with AYPF Logic Model: the model focuses on a similar variety of knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal resources students need for success. Students build the self efficacy they will need to be successful adults. The program uses a curriculum that is aligned with college readiness and success, integrating high school and college expectations and allowing students to progress as they are ready. Many schools also include summer-bridge courses that lead from middle school into early college. Students typically participate in assessments of their college readiness in the early high school grades, with the goal of taking college courses by the 11th grade. "College success" courses are taught by a high school teacher and provide students with strategies to succeed in the college courses, such as study habits and time management skills.

An experimental, third-party evaluation of North Carolina's ECHS Initiative is currently studying the impact of the schools. Early results of the evaluation showed that by the end of the 9th grade, ECHS students took and passed more college preparatory math courses than their peers in traditional schools. Furthermore, in comparison with students in a control group, ECHS reduced achievement gaps and students reported higher levels of academic engagement, particularly in math.

**David Sinski, Executive Director, After School Matters (ASM)**, spoke about this Chicago-based afterschool program that focuses on reinspiring and reengaging teens in low-income neighborhoods through practical apprenticeships in multiple career fields. The program strives to create a real world experience for youth that does not simply provide more school work in the afterschool hours; instead, the programs reflect young people's interests, pay youth for their work, and helps them prepare for life after high school

First beginning in 1991 with a summer arts job program, ASM later expanded into the afterschool realm and now includes other content areas in addition to the arts, such as technology, sports, and science. The program serves students across about 60 high schools with the help of numerous partners.

Apprenticeships offer youth opportunities to try new roles and capacities; work with deadlines; understand and receive feedback; and increase their exposure to new ideas. Teens continually receive feedback throughout their 10-week apprenticeship, where groups of 30 youth form working groups that reflect a real-world job setting. Guiding principles of the apprenticeships include:

- Providing real world oriented/ authentic activities in a safe environment
- Developing relationships with caring adults who are experts in their fields
- Exposing teens to a wide variety of careers and providing them with marketable skills
- Having youth apply their skills in ways that contribute to the community
- Offering opportunities beyond the programming

Third-party evaluations of ASM student performance found that the program is making a difference in the lives of youth. Compared to peers not in the program, ASM participants had higher school attendance

rates, failed a significantly lower percentage of core courses, and had higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates.

**Rachel Singer, Director of Academic Affairs at Kingsborough Community College, Opening Doors Learning Communities**, described the results of supporting first-semester community college students through learning communities that personalize the college environment and provide extra academic and social support.

Kingsborough Community College in New York City serves a diverse student body, and the majority of students are women and youth of color. The college has over 17,000 students in credit programs and approximately 20,000 students in continuing education. Facing the challenges of low student retention and graduation rates shared by many postsecondary institutions, the College sought to offer small cohort programs to improve student success and persistence at the institution. The College participated in the national Opening Doors demonstration led by MDRC in 2003 – 2005 in order to implement and evaluate these reforms. The resulting Opening Doors Learning Communities had the following characteristics:

- Groups of 25 students taking three linked courses together during the first semester. The clustered courses included English, a student success course taught by a counselor, and a standard college course such as sociology or health
- Faculty-coordinated assignments and discussion of student progress
- Student support in the form of textbook vouchers and extra tutoring and counseling

By reforming curriculum and instruction, enhancing student services, and increasing financial aid, Opening Doors was able to improve academic outcomes during the Learning Community semester, move students more quickly through developmental English, and improve student experiences. The study found a positive, though delayed, effect on persistence. Students from the study's initial cohort will continue to be tracked for three more years.

The study allowed Kingsborough Community College the opportunity to reflect on how Opening Doors helped transform student learning. The institution changed its policy so that all freshmen take English in their first semester, and experienced a surge in cross-departmental collaboration and a cultural shift toward evidence-based practices. With this information, the College has been able to streamline academic advising and registration processes, and has begun tracking the progress of students at all stages of their careers at the college in an effort provide ongoing, needed supports. The program boasts a 90% retention rate, and the college has the highest graduation rate in the City University of New York system.

#### *Question and Answer, Panel 1*

David Sinski responded to a question about how the current economic downturn is impacting the efforts of afterschool programs, especially as funding has been cut for many youth services that are not tied to the core academic curriculum. Sinski shared his focus on continuing to stress to a variety of sectors the relevance of his organization's work in preparing graduates for the work world. He is also looking to the opportunity afforded in the reauthorization of the ESEA to position out-of-school-time as part of a well-rounded experience for young people. However, he noted academic outcomes draw the most support and funding.

A question was asked of Vargas about whether, if students in the ECHS self-selected in, how that might skew the results of the evaluation. He responded that this is a dilemma when thinking about starting new schools, and that by virtue of the assignment process students will self identify. He noted that some districts are now adopting an early college approach for all students, such as in Hidalgo, Texas.

Vargas was asked about the scope of ECHS in North Carolina: how the state made such strong connections between K-12 and higher education, and how the model was so successfully scaled. Vargas responded that local leadership on campus, including college presidents, realized there was a shared interest in having students come to postsecondary education better prepared. For example, the head of the North Carolina community college system was a vocal advocate for the program. The ECHS Initiative in North Carolina also enjoyed the strong political support of former governor Mike Easley, the legislature, and now of current Governor Bev Perdue and Lieutenant Governor Walter Dalton.

A forum attendant asked the panel for suggestions on how a State Education Agency could share unfavorable outcome data in an environment where people aren't used to closely examining data. Singer responded that in a higher education environment, it's key to ensure that people know what's going on in a timely manner and receive information in a way that they can connect to their real life, and to understand that in the field of education research, even marginal improvements are commendable.

Sinski was asked about the alignment of the ASM program with the school curriculum. He noted that this is a huge struggle for afterschool programs, as they are pushed to demonstrate their connections to students' academic success. His program is exploring how to incorporate Supplemental Education Services funding into the ASM model, which would include a stronger connection to the school curriculum. He also emphasized that it is important for the afterschool world to realize that expanded learning providers are often not teachers; they are school partners and other experts with a unique but complimentary role.

The moderator asked the following question of the panel: given the Obama administration's recently released budget proposals and the upcoming reauthorization of ESEA, what suggestions would they provide to policymakers in an effort to help their programs? Vargas would advocate for state policies that support success stories like that of North Carolina, where there is less siloing of policy at the secondary and postsecondary levels and more incentives for high schools and colleges to articulate their requirements. Sinski responded that he would like to see the afterschool world reframed from that of childcare or babysitter service to a robust, expanded learning field with powerful outcomes. Singer said she is pleased that the current Administration is including community colleges in the discussions about supporting student success, and would like to see this portion of the education system stay engaged in the dialogue.

### ***Panel 2: Discussion on Implications for Federal and State Policy***

Brand summarized the policy recommendations included in *Success at Every Step*, including:

- Developing a comprehensive plan to provide academic and social support services to youth across the community.
- Supporting collaboration among providers to address the needs of students in a comprehensive manner by reducing barriers to coordination.
- Expanding learning opportunities and using the school-day hours differently with the purpose of adding time for learning and skill development in nonacademic areas.
- Using data and assessment to inform and continuously improve education and youth programs, and to identify the strategies that do work.

**Greg Darnieder, Special Assistant to the Secretary on College Access, US Department of Education,** spoke about the Administration's commitment to raising high school graduation and college enrollment rates through collaboration, transparency and the use of data.

Darnieder discussed the difficult, practical challenges of creating college- and career-ready systems, but also stated that the current political climate is very favorable to advances in this area. He emphasized the Administration's focus on the practical aspects of building inter-agency collaboration, in order to improve the connections between the education, workforce, and juvenile justice systems, as well as other agencies impacting youth development. He stressed that relationship-building at multiple levels is key, and that it is up to those at the state and local levels to take advantage of this collaborative approach by building cross-systems partnerships.

A necessary precondition for inter-agency collaboration is transparency about data, because common sets of indicators and outcomes need to be identified across federal agencies. A product of increased transparency and data-sharing is the new, simplified process for the Federal Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), allowing the automatic transfer of data from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax data to the FAFSA form and providing information directly to schools on their students' FAFSA completion rates.

Ultimately, the Administration wants to see movement not just in high school graduation rates but in college enrollment and completion rates. While efforts continue to improve high school attendance and graduate rates, the vision needs to shift toward persistency and graduation at the postsecondary level

**Ryan Reyna, Policy Analyst, Center for Best Practices, National Governors Association**, spoke about state-level initiatives to improve college- and career-readiness. He identified three main areas where states can use policy to create a framework that emphasizes college- and career-readiness for more students.

First, states can create a definition of college- and career- readiness, set goals to make that definition a reality, and conduct outreach so that all stakeholders understand these goals. Reyna noted that most states have focused their attention on the Adequate Yearly Progress provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act, which is based on reading and math proficiency, but the conversation around data is now shifting toward an emphasis on college preparation. He now sees an opportunity to set statewide goals to track system performance for college- and career-readiness, and help students truly achieve such a status. Some states, such as Minnesota, are already identifying what needs to be measured, including high school graduation rates, enrollment in college-ready coursework, performance on assessments designed to measure college- and career-readiness, and rates at which postsecondary students require remediation.

Second, states can create a system of accountability for ensuring college- and career-readiness. Such a system would include monitoring Advanced Placement and dual credit offerings, tracking whether students are on schedule to graduate ready for postsecondary success, and allowing for innovation zones, such as those found in Georgia and West Virginia, that offer some schools freedom from certain state-level requirements in order to allow flexibility and collaboration. Reyna said that currently only nine states offer high school assessments specifically aligned with the requirements for admission in their state colleges and universities; there are 10 states that are in the process of developing aligned assessments. It is critical for states to develop signals for students, schools, and districts, to judge whether their students are prepared for postsecondary education.

Third, states can develop policies that connect the high school and college years. Reyna discussed how policies can articulate agreements about dual enrollment in colleges and technical training schools, allowing high school students to simultaneously earn college credit. He also stated the need to move beyond high school exit exams that only measure proficiency at the 9<sup>th</sup>- or 10<sup>th</sup>-grade levels, and work to build a common set of core standards that are based on college- and career-readiness.

**Katharine Oliver, Assistant State Superintendent for Career and College Readiness, Maryland State Department of Education**, discussed how student achievement has been

promoted through a history of policy actions to reform education in the state of Maryland. A focus on accountability and school improvement established the context for improved practices to accelerate academic achievement and increased rigor of its career and technical education programs in order to align curricula with college- and career-readiness.

Oliver described the waves of school reform in the State beginning in 1989 with the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program that included the establishment of Maryland Learner Outcomes and a system of identification and support for low-achieving schools. Ten years later this work evolved into a grade-by-grade state curriculum with aligned assessments. Instructional tool kits and data systems support teachers in addressing student needs. Parallel action led to improvements in career and technical education (CTE). As Maryland enters its third wave of school reform, CTE is well-positioned to support student achievement through technical programs of study aligned to the academics and skills students need for success in postsecondary education and the workforce. Early college credit and industry certifications are in place to help students signal their readiness for post high school next steps.

She also noted the recent announcement of Maryland's top national ranking for increasing student access to and achievement in Advanced Placement courses. This success is attributed in part to the collaboration with the College Board that works with the teachers so they are supported in delivering content, and using data to ensure student success. It is another example of the State's commitment to ensuring students not only graduate from high school, but are successful in postsecondary learning and, ultimately, the workplace.

#### *Question and Answer, Panel 2*

A question was asked about the role that state and federal entities can play in allowing stakeholders involved in college- and career-readiness efforts to access student data to better support students, in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Reyna stated that states are working on making data more accessible to all stakeholders, but noted that realistically, different users need different types of data, and teachers, parents, and State Education Agency staff do not all need access to the same information. States are working to develop data systems to allow different users to see data depending on the purpose. Oliver noted that while Maryland has worked hard to collect data, there are significant limitations to its use. The state is working through the issue of how to track students into postsecondary education and the world of work.

Darnieder added that it is important to use data to initiate conversations with local leadership about how to address challenges that are beyond the capacity of K-12 systems, and how to promote cross-systems collaboration. A program's third-party evaluation data can provide the kind of accountability information that educators and leaders can use to build the political will to address college- and career-readiness. In particular, Darnieder stressed the need for positive outcomes that demonstrate increases in postsecondary enrollment without the need for remediation.

#### ***Conclusion***

This forum displayed the body of work being done to prepare youth for college and careers, and also addressed the policy implications for allowing more of this work to benefit students nationwide. The 23 programs featured in the AYPF publication, *Success at Every Step*, underwent rigorous, third-party evaluations and emerged with results showing a positive impact on students' success in school and in

preparation for life after high school. The forum highlighted three of these effective program models, including early college high schools, apprenticeships, and learning communities at the postsecondary level. Federal and state policy leaders discussed initiatives to align high school and postsecondary assessments and requirement. They also noted the need for collaboration among different youth-serving agencies at the local, state, and national levels.