

## **CONNECTICUT COLLEGE ACCESS CHALLENGE GRANT FY 2011-2012 PROJECT ABSTRACT**

Connecticut is often described as being two states in one, where the extreme high performance of some is capable of masking the challenges of many. Even though Connecticut has a high college going rate compared to other states in the nation (though notably, its ranking is slipping), it suffers from the largest achievement gap in the country. This is evidenced not only by its scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), but also by students' performance on state K-12 assessments. This achievement gap persists in higher education where recent data show that between 60-80% of public high school graduates should take remedial math, English or both upon entry into their programs the fall following their high school graduation. Disproportionately, these students are the low-income and minority students.

Two years ago, Connecticut established a P-20 Council based on the reality that the economic vitality of a state is strongly related to the educational attainment levels of its citizens. The Council created a set of nine principles to be the foundation of its work. Among them are the need for collaboration, the belief that all students can be college and career ready, and the need for each segment of the P-20 pathway to understand the expectations of the next in order to adequately prepare students for success. The Council's overall goal is to increase the proportion of students earning a postsecondary credential. Impeding this outcome are high needs of remediation in college; inadequate information about college expectations and planning among students, family and high school staff; and relationships between school districts and colleges that are more happenstance than systemic. While each of these is directly related to each other, addressing them requires different strategies at the student, staff, and systems levels.

Connecticut proposes to utilize the College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) to address the student, staff and systems levels in support of Goal 1) to increase the knowledge of underrepresented students, families and school staff about college and career planning and readiness by a) increasing the knowledge of underrepresented students and their parents of educational financial aid options, b) increasing the knowledge of students and their parents of postsecondary readiness and planning, and c) increasing the knowledge of district and college staff and administrators of postsecondary readiness and planning. Additionally, to support Goal 2) to decrease the proportion of underrepresented students entering postsecondary needing remediation by a) increasing the number of underrepresented students successfully completing math and English courses aligned with college readiness expectations, and b) increasing the knowledge of educational leaders and policy makers about the relationship between high school behaviors and early success in college.

The projects described below have been strategically selected to address each of these goals and objectives based on their alignment with the overall goal of the P-20 Council, and their potential for systemic change with an eye toward scalability across the state to serve more underrepresented students as we progress over the coming years.

### Projects

1. Support the *P-20 Council Project Manager* to work with stakeholders to set targets for higher education access and completion; develop systems with partner school districts to allow for the gathering of data on at-risk students progressing towards and through higher education; to develop regional partnerships to support the development of programs and policies to increase student access to and completion of higher education; and to identify and develop educator effectiveness deliverables which provide a plan for educators to better prepare students for higher education.

Finally, the Project Manager is the state's representative for the Complete College America initiative.

2. The *FAFSA First* project will provide FAFSA completion assistance in three cities through Co-Opportunity's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) tax preparation services and make presentations in targeted schools on college planning, the importance of FAFSA completion, and help complete FAFSAs with interested students. In addition, the Connecticut Office of Financial and Academic Affairs for Higher Education (OFAA) will hold a *High School Counselor Financial Aid Workshop* for high school counselors to provide informational sessions on college preparedness, admissions, financial aid, and other areas related to assisting underserved students to move onto higher education. OFAA will also update its "*Connecticut Student Financial Assistance Pamphlet*" which provides a description of the various aid programs for which students may be eligible to be distributed widely across the state and available on-line as a PDF.
3. College Ready 21
  - a. *Community College / High School Partnerships*: Manchester Community College, in partnership with Manchester and East Hartford High Schools, seek to pilot curricula developed to address the remedial math and English needs of underrepresented students, as well as curricula for 9<sup>th</sup> graders related to developing the necessary knowledge, skills and behaviors to be college and career ready. They will also work to expand into Rockville High School and one Hartford high school in summer 2012. Naugatuck Valley Community College, in partnership with Wilby High School in Waterbury, will work with a targeted group of seniors that will be brought to the college campus to address the same issues.

- b. *College and Career Readiness Workshops and Tools*: The Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) will provide facilitation of three regional workshops about college and career readiness for education leaders, a toolkit of resources and action planning guides for cross-system partnerships to improve student outcomes, and individualized services to approximately two district/college partnerships.
  - c. The *Connecticut Pre-Engineering Program (CPEP)* will provide two innovative summer programs for incoming 9<sup>th</sup> graders targeting underrepresented students behind in math skills; engage former CPEP graduates as mentors to stress the link to college; and students will develop short videos of the importance of college and career readiness and planning for public distribution. Student producers of the winning videos will receive scholarships.
4. The *Access to Success Initiative* of the Connecticut State University System will work with sixteen heavy-feeder districts across the state to administer the Accuplacer Diagnostic targeting underrepresented students, provide workshops to students and high school counselors about college planning and culture, as well as analyze the relationship between high school course-taking patterns and early college success of recently enrolled students.
  5. A *Community Outreach Team* will be enhanced with an additional position within the Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education. The Team will provide training to counselors, speak at financial aid and admissions events for school counselors, create comprehensive education materials on the topic of access and completion, and serve as bridge-counselors between high schools and state colleges and universities.
  6. A *College & Career Readiness Website* will be developed to assist students, families, education staff and leaders with information about college and career readiness. For staff and leaders, the website will complement the materials developed for the

workshops described above. For students, it will provide one location where they access information needed for planning and decision making. A smart-phone application will also be developed for students.