

Community College of Philadelphia: Leadership Institute 2010-2011 Project Report

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1) A Bridge to College

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History of the Project: We began our team process by discussing some of the things that were most troubling to us in today's educational system. We were all concerned about the number of students arriving at the Community College of Philadelphia without the academic readiness to successfully complete college level work. We also were concerned about the challenges faced by low-income, first generation college students as they attempted to complete the college application process. To address these issues, the original purpose of our project was to provide orientation sessions aimed at middle school students and their parents. Information was to be provided to help students think about how to best prepare themselves for college and to help parents assist their children in this process. We also wanted to offer help to students and parents on navigating the college application process. We hoped to create a companion Website which would echo or repeat information presented at the orientation sessions, so interested students and parents could pursue these resources more easily. Although the focus was to be on applying to Community College of Philadelphia, it was hoped that the project could expand to applying to college in general.

We had a very fruitful meeting with our mentor, Dean David Thomas, who listened carefully to what we were interested in accomplishing. He helped us to understand that there has been a lot of information developed and programs implemented to help students manage the college application process; however, there has been much less done covering the subject of the K-16 Disconnect (or the failure of K-12 education to align with college-level expectations) and solutions to this challenge. He felt that our project should focus on providing information about the college application process but with a heavy emphasis on the K-16 Disconnect and what resources are available for students and parents to better prepare academically for college.

With this general mission in mind, we began to plan our orientation sessions which would be offered as a service to a selected community of students and their parents in the School District of Philadelphia while also raising awareness of the Community College of Philadelphia residents in positive ways. Our initial plan was to use the Community College of Philadelphia's TRIO Upward Bound Program as a way to focus our project. The Upward Bound Program currently serves five Philadelphia high schools that are dispersed throughout the city, including Benjamin Franklin High School, Thomas

Edison High School, Germantown High School, South Philadelphia High School, and West Philadelphia High School. Our hope was to connect with the Parent Ombudsmen at the mostly K-8 feeder schools to Benjamin Franklin High School. We wanted to target eighth grade students and their parents so that these students could gain information that would allow them to take full advantage of all four years of high school to prepare for college. To that end, our team made contact with Jack Hamilton, Special Assistant to the Associate Superintendent, School District of Philadelphia, and John Frangipani, Assistant Superintendent for Middle Schools, School District of Philadelphia who supported the project and offered to help us coordinate with the necessary school personnel to set up the workshop sessions.

Then unique opportunities seemed to present themselves at Benjamin Franklin High School. Since one of our team members, Lynne Sutherland, Director of Community College of Philadelphia's TRIO Upward Bound Program, had a working relationship with Jessica Sasko, the Manager of the Student Success Center at Benjamin Franklin High School, we began to explore possibilities of working directly with the High School as its personnel recruited at the middle schools and offered parent/student information sessions in June and August for incoming ninth grade students for the 2011-2012 academic year. We met at Benjamin Franklin High School with Ms. Sasko and Assistant Principal Lynne Podrat to discuss possibilities. We all came away from that meeting excited and feeling that a stronger connection between Benjamin Franklin High School and the Community College of Philadelphia, given their proximity, was a logical and good thing to be concentrating on. There was some anxiety, however. The School District of Philadelphia had revealed its budget deficit problems, and both Ms. Sasko and Assistant Principal Podrat were uncertain about exactly what would happen the following year—as are administrators, teachers, and staff at most schools across the district. But based on our connections at Ben Franklin, we began concentrating our efforts there and stopped exploring the Parent Ombudsmen contacts.

What happened next, none of us anticipated. We recently learned that the Student Success Center at Ben Franklin has been cut as a District budget reduction measure. Principal Christopher Johnson is against this step, but how much control he has over saving the Student Success Center is unclear, and Ms. Sasko is preparing to close the Center by June 30. The situation may change, but no one is willing to make any commitments at this point.

It is our team's feeling that no matter what measures we had explored (the Parent Ombudsmen or Benjamin Franklin's outreach programs to incoming students) as mechanisms to reach middle school students and their parents about preparing for college and applying to college, the instability created by the School District of Philadelphia's financial situation has fundamentally undermined any efforts we made to coordinate with District administrators, teachers, and staff. Their situations are too precarious to allow meaningful coordination at this time.

We have put together a range of materials on academically preparing for college and navigating the college application process, and though we regret the devolution of

our plans, we propose to create an informational document on both these subjects as our final project. We are still exploring how we will disseminate the document but have confirmed with Maria Diaz-Aparicio that the document can be given out to parents at the District's Parent University. We also would like to make the document available to Community College of Philadelphia's admissions department to be sent out in response to inquiries from middle schools.

2) There are multiple, interlinking problems that stop parents from helping their children apply to college (poor middle and high school counseling, lack of information, complicated and differing procedures between schools, SAT and ACT testing, FAFSA, etc.). Many Philadelphia residents want their children to go to college but are uncertain and intimidated about how to prepare their children for college and how to navigate the process, and this is compounded for first generation college students and their parents. Our project goal is to create an informational document to address academically preparing for college and navigating the college application process for parents and middle school students.

3) Our project relates to the Community College of Philadelphia's Achieving the Dream goal of "increasing student persistence and success," because the better students are prepared in middle school and high school for college level work, the better they perform at the college level.

Susan Goldberger and Richard Kazis say, in their article, "What Counts as Community College Success? Better Ways to Answer the Question," from *Change: The Magazine of Higher Education* (January-February 2009), "The most significant predictor of college success [is]—the academic readiness of incoming students." They also mention the Achieving the Dream goals of "better aligning of standards, assessments, and expectations with K-12 systems, through greater joint efforts to improve the college readiness of high school graduates." Better alignment of standards is a specific goal of our project. Because of the nation-wide problem of the K-16 Disconnect our informational document will focus on making parents and students aware of the disconnect and suggest things that they can do in middle and high school to better prepare themselves for college.

4) The Research that supports this project comes from many different sources, but for this summary, we highlight Leadership Institute documents that highlight the importance of K-16 articulation attempts and e-mail letters to Community College of Philadelphia's Admissions asking for some kind of Community College of Philadelphia /middle school orientation materials. We also found reference to both college specific and state-wide efforts at K-16 articulation.

Community College of Philadelphia's 2008-2012: Strategic Plan

p. 30, "Recruitment and Retention of Students": The college commits itself to "programs focused on preparing high school students for the transition to college will be expanded."

p. 34, "Programs and Services: Additions, Deletions and Improvements":

The college also commits to “new programs and services to promote increased access to the College are implemented.”

A Bridge to College relates to both of these Strategic Plan goals in middle and high school student alignment and transition to college-level work and by providing increased access through understanding the college-application process.

Carol Lincoln’s “Achieving the Community-College Dream,” *Change: The Magazine of Higher Education*. January-February 2009.

Carol Lincoln presentation of Norwalk Community College’s model of “community conversation” on K-16 alignment notes “the discussion covered making more successful transitions from one educational level to the next, providing stronger student support, and creating better access to information about resources at the institution.”

Additionally, Norwalk has “a number of early-college programs that bring middle and high school students to campus over the school year and summer for educational and enrichment programs such as African drumming, word processing, physical fitness, and culinary arts.”

A Bridge to College, as stated above, would increase alignment and access.

E-mail correspondence given to our LI team by Diane Kae (Community College of Philadelphia Admissions) of recent requests for middle school/college orientation opportunities:

10/12/2010

“College Visits for Middle Schoolers”

Dear CCP Admissions,

My name is Elaine Leigh and I am an Educational Advisor at ASPIRA for several middle schools in North Philadelphia. This year we would like to plan both Fall and Spring visits to CCP for students in the 7th and 8th grades to learn more about college access and their academic options. Since this is a younger group, we are looking for opportunities to expose them to the preparation needed and demands of college-level work and also give them an understanding of college student life.

Please let me know if you are willing to host a middle school group and what dates would work best for you. Thank you for your time and help and I look forward to working with you.

Best,

Elaine Leigh

10/15/2010

“College Opportunity”

Hi Tarsha,

I am an elementary school teacher in West Philadelphia. We have recently added the AVID program to our curriculum. The avid belief is advancement via individual

determination. I was hoping that you can connect me with some local graduates of Community College of Philadelphia to speak to my middle school kids. I want to provide them with as many local college opportunities as early as possible. I was also wondering if there was any literature that you can send me to advertise your school (posters, pennants, pencils, advertisements). Are there any opportunities to visit the campus? Please let me know how I can introduce my students to your school. Thank you in advance.

Caren Iannelli

Both of these e-mails are representative of requests that Diane Kae, Director of Community Outreach for Community College of Philadelphia's Admission Department, receives on a regular basis from middle school administrators and teachers. These administrators and teachers are very interested in developing middle school/college orientation materials which our project would provide and which currently do not exist.

Nationally, there appear to be quite a range of high school/college articulation efforts but fewer middle school/college articulation efforts. Those middle school/college articulation efforts that do exist tend to be academic enrichment programs that are either college specific or part of state-wide K-16 articulation efforts. For example, the Hudson Valley Community College runs a Summer Technology Enrichment Program (STEP) for middle school students and the Onondage Community College runs a The College for Kids Program. Craven Community College has a "Gateway Craven" program providing middle school enrichments: Camp Craven is a summer enrichment camp while the Craven SEEK (Supplemental Enrichment and Exploration for Kids) is an after-school enrichment program. Other programs are ones that the Community College of Philadelphia already participates in such as TRIO Upward Bound and GEAR UP (Gaining Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs). The Ohio Learning Extension Network is one state-wide K-16 articulation effort, but Maryland and Georgia also have efforts underway. New Mexico is developing an ENLACE/GEAR UP (ENgaging LATino Communities for Education/ Gaining Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) collaborative, specifically targeting Latinos for higher education. As part of ENLACE/GEAR UP, New Mexico uses the AVID program (Advancement via Individual Determination, a national college preparatory program) in its middle and high schools.

At this time, it seems logical to work on middle school/college articulation. However, more ambitious programs of bringing middle school students on campus for enrichment activities like after school programs or summer camps is beyond the scope of our project but could be pursued at a later date.

5) Our project, "A Bridge to College," will create a document designed to target middle school 8th graders and their parents. The document will focus on explaining the K-16 Disconnect and what students can do while in high school to be prepared for college-level work. For example, recommendations will be made for ways to improve reading comprehension and writing skills, how to find tutoring help and how to prepare for

college placement tests. The document will also include information on the college application process such as what factors are important in selecting a college, how to do well on the SATs, how to write an effective personal essay and how to apply for financial aid (See History of the Project above.)

6) Our project has not turned out the way we first envisioned it, but we do think that we have compiled good resources that can help middle-school students and their parents better prepare their children for college-level work and help them understand the college application process.

7 and 8) Our materials will be associated with the TRIO Upward Bound Program but can be shared with Admissions or any office that receives request about middle school/college articulation and orientation. This situation can be sustained long-term.

9) We can adapt our workshop orientation survey to the information materials and try to get feedback that way. However, getting feedback from a live and captive audience would have been a lot easier than distributing informational documents and getting voluntary surveys back.

10) Individual Summaries of What We have Learned:

Kathleen—I got to meet and work with three intelligent and compassionate women who in my English Department/Liberal Studies bubble I wouldn't have had the opportunity to really get to know. Our team worked very well together; every member took initiatives to contribute meaningfully to our project and communicate with each other every step of the way. We were flexible and adaptive. I am proud of the relationships we have forged, and I hope we will find ways to have contact after the year is over. I am sure a team can function in a leadership role, and I think our project is important in addressing the K-16 Disconnect, but what I liked about our team was that no one person “dominated” the group. Perhaps we lead more through “swarm theory” in that we were sensitive to each other's strengths and weaknesses and compensated consciously and even unconsciously for those (like the caribou herd).

I also learned that you can't control everything. You can make good plans, but some things are beyond your control. In September and January, we couldn't predict the School District's dire financial situation. Mercifully, we are not facing an earthquake or Tsunami, and we can salvage meaningful informational materials for parents and middle school children out of all our hard work. But we have had to lower our expectations to align with the realities that we are facing, and I am sure leaders everywhere have to make such compromises.

Lynne – On my job, I have worked with the same full-time staff for the past nine years. In many ways this has been wonderful because as team members we know each other very well and are attuned to what each other bring to the team as strengths and

weaknesses; however, one of the things I have enjoyed about working on my Leadership Institute team project is the opportunity to work with three professionals with whom I did not have a working history. It has been good to observe myself in a new context and to adjust myself to new personalities and working styles. I have really enjoyed working with my teammates and feel that I have added three very insightful, bright and sensitive professional colleagues to my social network.

Working on this project has made me realize how the accomplishment of a project does not happen in a “straight line”. Initial ideas branch off into even newer ideas. One change in a project can lead to other unanticipated changes. I think the challenge for a leader is to move effectively with change. The process of our project is very much like what happens to leaders in the world on a daily basis. Unexpected things do happen. In these situations, some may become paralyzed and others will find a way to move forward. I am proud to be a member of a group who decided to regroup, examine our options and move forward with accomplishing our goal in a different way.

Tammy- During the past eight months, I have learned so much about myself, as a person and as a leader, due to my participation in the Leadership Institute. The readings were well selected and very informative and the group sessions have been packed with activities and discussions that have challenged me to think outside of my box and consider alternative approaches to leadership. I had heard a great deal about the project component of this experience and was extremely excited about getting the opportunity to work with a team of my colleagues to develop something that would have a positive and lasting impact on the CCP community. I had considered applying for the Leadership Institute a few years earlier but I hesitated because I was concerned that it might be too difficult to coordinate with other members of my team in order to work on our project, especially since my entire teaching load is at CCP regional centers during the fall and spring semesters. After our first session last September, I left very excited about the twelve members of our group, ten of whom I had never met before, and I could not wait to hear the results of the team selections.

Working on the leadership project with Joan Goffe, Kathleen Murphey and Lynne Sutherland has been a very pleasant experience and I have learned so much from all three of them, just by observing them in action and admiring their individualized and diverse styles of leadership. We all share a few things in common, including our strong work ethics and compassionate natures and we have been fortunate enough to function as a cohesive team all year long. The fact that I am not on main campus has not been a limitation, especially since our team communicates so freely via email and telephone. All four of us have had very busy schedules this year but this has not affected our ability to come together to get the job done, and in fact, a few of our meetings have actually been held at a regional center. Our team has operated under a code of mutual respect and consideration for one another and for all opinions and suggestions, and despite the fact that circumstances have forced us to make adjustments to our original project idea, we are unified and prepared to meet our challenge and we will continue to work hard in order to finalize our project and produce something that we can all be proud of.

Joan - I learned that it is not good to be a laid back leader. A leader should not stay on the balcony for too long. It is important for a leader to engage in the task at hand with others especially when working with other leaders. It is important to communicate with group members, in this case other leaders and mentors. I understand that it is okay to seek the opinion of others. I have learned that I have been working with resourceful people at NWRC and I can consult them and it is no problem for them to give me their opinion. From the meeting my group attended at Benjamin Franklin High School I learned that there is a hunger out there for students and parents who do not know or understand the college process. Some questions that may arise are: What do students need to know in order to start preparing from middle school through high school for college? How do we educate parents on the available resources for college? Most people would not believe that I can be an emotional person. I say this to say that I have learned through this project that I have gained more control over this area of my life. Through my uneasiness the team has taught me to relax.

I have learned to be a willing leader who can enter the dance floor even though I might be nervous, in order to assist other leaders in providing the information needed to both students and their parents even if it puts me in the spot light. I have always been a person to work behind the scenes and never wanted to be in the spot light. I have seen each member show respect to each other. We would give attention and respect to the person who had the floor at the time. They would voice their opinion about what that team member said, whether they agreed with it or not. This was done in a respectful way. There were times when I did not voice an opinion. One may think that they would continue talking like I was not there, but they did not. I was pulled into the discussion whether I liked it or not. This has taught me as a leader that I can gently nudge another member of my team to give their opinion no matter how small or great it might be. Everyone's opinion counts and he/she is important to the team. Every team member counts and is needed for the project to survive as well as for the team as a whole to survive. As quiet as I have been, I have found our contacts with each other a delight whether it was in person, over the phone, or via email.