

Making College Readiness a Reality

2006-2009

HECA Grant Program *Illinois Board of Higher Education*

Synopsis

Despite many effective school reforms over the past two decades, achievement gaps still persist, especially for minority and low-income students. Students living in poverty have few role models for attendance at post-secondary institutions, nor for work and careers. It has become incumbent upon local school districts not only to prepare students, but also to instill a vision for their future. Students cannot dream of a future, set goals, or work towards attainment if they have never seen a college campus nor understood the connection between secondary success and admittance to post-secondary education, with, ultimately, the opportunity to succeed financially and contribute to the community. It is imperative to create the technical structures and adaptive supports across the P-12 and higher education sectors to prepare and support first-generation and underrepresented college attendees.

This three-year P-20 project (now completing its first year) has three goals: (1) to expand a successful college readiness program for non-traditional students at Springfield's Lanphier High School to the other two high schools in the district, so that the program becomes district-wide; (2) to adapt and replicate the Springfield model in two other large unit school districts with similar demographics, in order to establish college preparation programs in conjunction with higher-education partners and to develop a replication "toolkit" for use by other districts in the state; and (3) to provide the state with research and data analysis to inform policy-making related to effective college preparation.

The project has accomplished all of its first-year objectives. Springfield has established program structures and personnel at its two additional high schools and begun implementation there. Bloomington District 87 and McLean County Unit 5 districts have developed replication plans, identified cohorts of participating students, and established project infrastructures and personnel for implementation in the 2007-08 school year. Project personnel have established quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis protocols, and have begun both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Toolkit components are being defined and artifact collection has begun.

In the second year of the project, districts will begin to institutionalize their pipeline programs through redefining job descriptions and making budget commitments and providing services to students and parents with their higher education partners. Both process data and outcome data will be collected and analyzed. Preliminary data should be available by the end of the second project year. The project staff will also begin to engage the Large Unit District Association (LUDA), which includes Chicago 299, with project presentations and a symposium for recruiting additional districts and schools to begin planning for model adoption/adaptation.