

Dispatch

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K-16 Initiatives More Than the Sum of Their Parts

Housatonic Community College Builds High School Bridges

BY ANDREA SALZBURG

Located in Bridgeport, the largest and poorest city in Connecticut's Fairfield County, Housatonic Community College (HCC) learned early on that in order for its students to succeed, the effort must start in the high school. Taking action to remedy this situation, the college has developed multiple programs that are designed to help students stay in college and graduate.

For many years, HCC has had a high school partnership program that encourages well-qualified students to take a college course or two while they are still in the 11th or 12th grade. Recommended students can receive college credit for these successfully completed courses. Students pay no tuition fee and classes meet after regular high school class time or on weekends.



Middle College students working hard in the computer lab on their English assignments.

remedy this gap. It is funded by private and community foundations, area corporations, and assistance from the State of Connecticut GEAR UP program.

Currently in its third year, 60 students from three Bridgeport high schools are bussed to the college during regular school time and take a one-semester college course taught over the academic year in either college-level Math (Intermediate Algebra) or in Developmental English (Writing: Paragraph to Essay). Students who successfully

complete the course with a grade of C or higher are eligible to receive three college credits and other acknowledgements of their success.

Team teaching links high school and college instructors and clearly demonstrates the differences in high school and college curriculums and expectations. Teaching assistants and master tutors provide supplemental assistance.

The results of the Middle College Program have been positive. Students improve their reading comprehension, writing and mathematical skills, and gain knowledge about the community college experience. They are held to college-level expectations throughout the program year and they gain the confidence that higher education is within their reach.

Helping students to be “ready” in the intricacies of college also contributes to their success. The Housatonic Bridges program addresses these needs and is part of the national Achieving the Dream initiative. Funded through a grant from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, Bridges is in its second year and includes four workshops conducted at the college or at the participating high schools. These workshops in Financial Aid, Career Preparation, Orientation to College, and College Placement Test Preparation are open to students and their parents or guardians and are designed to help them make the transition to college easier. Bridges has been met with enthusiasm and the support of high school administrators. Additional support for this program has come through a grant from the Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority (CHEFA).

The value of Bridges will be tracked as the students enter college. In addition to the expectation of a smoother transition to college, it is anticipated that the first-year experience for these students will be more positive.

Another benefit of these programs has been the strengthened relationships between the college and the administrators and counselors in Bridgeport's high schools. The guidance counselors are increasingly involved and administrators are appreciative and supportive of the importance of these programs.

continued on page 13



Housatonic Community College *continued from page 9*

The results have been dramatic. Recently a Housatonic instructor recommended a computer program which would help Middle College high school students with their homework. With the help of a technical support coordinator from a participating high school, within three days all the high schools involved had installed this program and it was available to the students.

The strong collaboration forged between Housatonic and the high schools will benefit Bridgeport area students and help them to reach their goals and achieve their dreams. **CRD**

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