

**Preliminary recommendations on improving college completion  
among current students (high school and college)**

*From discussions hosted at the St. Louis Regional Chamber, June 20, 2013*

**DRAFT for REVIEW**

**What must the St. Louis region do to break into a new trajectory toward the top ten?**

- 1) We must start in high school to help students earn credits that can be applied toward a college degree.
  - Provide incentives for high schools to push AP courses, so that students can start college with credits and save money
  - Push for a statewide standard for transfer credits so students do not lose so many credits in the process
  - Standardize transfer of credits across institutions in the region
  - Align transfer courses among two- and four-year colleges
  
- 2) The personal and academic funding model must be changed
  - Change public policy to make money available for remedial coursework, saving options, loans
  - Support state funding for need-based student aid in programs in both Missouri and Illinois
  - Set up matched savings programs for college
  - Address the problem of tuition by finding ways to decrease costs, address needs of low income families
  - Provide additional support and opportunity through employee matching and giving, new aid options
  - Understand how private funding could be transformative in terms of navigating the funding gap (set a goal!). What commitment to raise private funds does each university need to commit to? Can they provide different types of loan or support?
  - Do away with out-of-district tuition; make it the same for instate and out-of-state students.
  - Consider draft language that was submitted for state legislation to establish a Missouri Higher Education Academic Scholarship Program.
  
- 3) To ensure success in school, we must address both external barriers and internal motivations.
  - Develop an early drop-out warning system, with use of data and intense advising, intervention and support
  - Build college and financial literacy
    - College 101
    - Summer bridge

- Dual enrollment to earn college credits in high school
  - Implement mandatory classes in financial literacy
- Provide additional needed supports
    - Counseling outreach
    - First contact advising, quality experience
    - Early engagement in student activities
    - Get kids on campus
    - Prepare high school students for college
    - Alumni mentorship programs involving first gen graduates and new first gen students
  - Look at the students who are completing college and ask why; don't just look at the ones who are not completing.
- 4) Colleges and universities in the region can coordinate, collaborate more for student benefits
- Look at best practices from colleges / universities that have higher rates of completion among their students (especially those who are 1<sup>st</sup> generation or lower-income) and encourage replication.
  - Pool resources, best practices for helping first-generation students (university 101 classes; learning communities)
  - Align with American Association of College and Universities (AAC&U) Liberal Education and American Progress (LEAP) values. Those skills will prepare students for the jobs that don't exist yet
  - Strengthen partnerships between public / private schools
  - Teach non-cognitive skills
  - Develop a shared definition of financial need
  - Develop a "college culture" in the region
  - Universities should accept responsibility for graduating as many of their students as possible, and not pass the blame down to K-12. If they accept the students, they should be responsible for graduating them.
- 5) Stronger partnerships between the school districts, colleges / universities, corporations, and non-profits need to be developed and nurtured.
- Schools should work closer with business and industries to demonstrate that jobs are available. They should help students understand the needs and expectations of the real business world and what they expect from their employees
  - Work closer with businesses to understand what the needs will be.
  - Businesses need to provide more funding, more internship opportunities so college students are more prepared to be integrated into the workforce

- 6) The St. Louis region must lead a comprehensive effort to increase student preparedness at all levels – with parents, K-12, colleges and universities all taking ownership. This will require a coordinated focus on preparedness, from birth through high school
  - Increase student academic readiness, as measured by more students sitting for and scoring highly on ACT, SAT, PSAT, SATII, AP, and IB exams (for example)
  - Encourage personal development in non-cognitive skills, such as leadership, grit, perseverance, etc.
  - Promote access and understanding, so that students will develop advocacy skills to pursue their own unique pathway.
  - Raise level of preparation via attention to public schools, common core standards
  - Need longer school day and academic year for PK-12 and Career Education
  - Consider draft language that was submitted for state legislation to require greater transparency and accountability from K-12 school districts
  
- 7) The region should help families prepare their children for a successful college career
  - Families should understand, navigate, and develop the unique pathway to and through college for their child
  - Parents should teach financial literacy from birth
  - Educate parents about the process. Parents can't teach or support what they don't know
  - Holistic college and career readiness for student and parent / guardian. Educate parents regarding the importance, options, and benefits of education.
  - Need a clear strategy to support families with a student who will be first generation
  
- 8) The region should reach out to educate and empower students
  - Why does someone need an education?
  - How can students advocate for themselves?
  - Concentrate on educating younger students to let them know college is a possibility for K-12

**What are the underlying trends and issues holding us back?**

- Ever increasing costs and less financial aid.
  - The issue of \$1-3k being a barrier for enrollment. Families and prospective students need to ask the Financial Aid offices to help work this out.
- Student motivation
- Lack of awareness in the community
- All credentials are not equal ... getting people to qualify for credentials will be harder than getting an English drop-out to a BA in general studies.
- Social challenges that interfere with students looking at college as a worthwhile option
  - Lack of college counselors at all schools who are trained adequately

- Insufficient college prep and counseling and helping of students and families to navigate all the issues for college prep and retention (APRS, financing)
- Not educating the parents / guardians.
- Stop targeting the student, but target the families!
- Academic issues
  - Generational make-up of the classroom.
  - Semester structure just doesn't work for many students, especially those who are part-time
  - Integrating soft skills into the curriculum
- Concerned about any focus that is not on K-12.
  - We'll start having a solution that has to be applied generationally. This will further the cycle!
  - We have to expose students before the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades to higher education prep and options.
  - College readiness
  - Lack of engagement between secondary and post-secondary schools
- Will the 'why' being asked by this group hinder the bigger picture, given the "why" needs of economic development?