



**MHEC 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Policy Summit**  
*Ready or Not Here They Come*  
*Ensuring the College Success of All Students*

## **Summary of Curriculum and Academic Preparation: Session Two**

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Can college preparation improve through a state initiative? To answer this question, Noel Radomski, director and associate researcher with the Wisconsin Center for the Advancement of Postsecondary Education (WISCAPE), moderated two panels, one highlighting the Montana University System Writing Assessment and the other the St. Cloud (Minnesota) Area Access and Opportunity Center.

Jan Clinard, college readiness director at the University of Montana-Helena, and William MacGregor, director of academic strategies and transferability initiatives with the Montana University System, provided examples of how the Montana University System Writing Assessment (MUSWA) reduced the number of students who needed remedial courses at the college level. With the challenges of increasing costs for remedial courses and student under-preparedness, MUSWA proved that a better way to improve college readiness can be found in committed visionary leadership, uniform assessment, and ownership by field practitioners. Because of MUSWA, the proportion of students at or above the proficient level increased from 37.8 percent to 75 percent among all participants regardless of college aspirations. High schools located in American Indian reservation areas that used MUSWA also showed a noticeable increase in the number of students at or above the proficient level.

The second presentation introduced Robert Johnson, Julia Espe, and Phil Schroeder who discussed a partnership developed among 4-year public and 2-year public colleges and universities and a local school district to deal with the achievement gap in racial and ethnic minority students in Minnesota. For example, enrollment of students of color soared between 1988 and 2011 from less than 5 percent to nearly 30 percent in School District 742 (St. Cloud). Because of the rapidly changing demographics and achievement gap between White, affluent students and low-income, racial and ethnic minority, immigrant and first-generation students, funding from the state initiated the Access and Opportunity Program (AOP) center in St. Cloud.

The experience of the AOP underscores the importance of collaboration and a one-stop approach in serving this underrepresented population. Collaborative efforts among different levels of institutions have resulted in improved program outcomes, including increased academic achievement, college readiness, and college persistence among the students of color, low income, first-generation and immigrant students. This collaborative model, implemented through a learning center, provides a unique comprehensive service located within public schools for easier access. Staff members help prepare students for college by introducing postsecondary options, mentoring, tutoring, running summer programs, providing English learning services, curriculum planning, and test preparation. AOP has served more than 1,400 students since 2008. Students served by the AOP have demonstrated noticeable

improvements in Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) and Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test scores. Following the AOP initiative, several grassroots movements emerged among various organizations, such as private community institutions, faith communities, and a student success task force.

Both presentations highlighted different initiatives that have proven successful in increasing college readiness and success. According to the presenters, one of the challenges in providing mentorship, college-ready activities, and career college activities has been encouraging the students to use the programs. However, one of the most valuable byproducts of the program was an increased understanding of how collaboration can work. Another key component of success is assisting students from underrepresented backgrounds to become role models themselves for their siblings and people around them to encourage them to seek college access.