



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

**November 14-15, 2011 – Iowa City, Iowa**

The 7<sup>th</sup> annual MHEC policy summit, *Ready or Not Here They Come: Ensuring the College Success of All Students*, brought over 200 participants from the K-12, higher education, government, business, and non-profit sectors to Iowa City to discuss issues surrounding college readiness and success. The summit focused on three core dimensions of college readiness: Curriculum and Academic Preparation; Financial Planning and Literacy; and Awareness, Aspirations, and Motivation. Each of the three program tracks included presentations and discussion related to current research, policy strategies, and promising practices for improving college readiness.

Jamie Merisotis, president and CEO of Lumina Foundation for Education, delivered the opening keynote address. Merisotis discussed Lumina's *Goal 2025* and challenged participants to increase the proportion of adults with high-quality postsecondary degrees and credentials to 60% by the year 2025. Merisotis emphasized the need for collaboration from all stakeholders in helping prepare students for college as well as in supporting them to complete their degrees. While the remaining policy summit sessions addressed different areas of educational support and success, there were many themes repeated throughout the event.

Following the opening address, participants divided into three different tracks according to their interests. One of the common themes in the presentations across all tracks was the need to work towards decreasing the achievement gap among different groups of students while increasing overall retention and graduation rates. This includes providing additional and more effective forms of support to racial minority and low-income students. In the Curriculum and Academic Preparation track, coordinated by the Wisconsin Center for the Advancement of Postsecondary Education (WISCAPE), presenters discussed different aspects and challenges of the achievement gap and the importance of increasing the rates of degree attainment. Current research was presented by Elizabeth Vaade of WISCAPE and April Hansen of ACT, while Elaine Johnson of the Illinois Community College Board discussed collaborative efforts of the legislature, public universities, and community colleges in Illinois to implement the Illinois College and Career Readiness Act.

Also in the Curriculum and Academic Preparation track, Jan Clinard and William MacGregor discussed efforts to develop and implement the Writing Assessment program in the Montana University System and the effect of the program on decreasing the need for remedial courses once students enter college. A panel representing a public 4-year university, a public 2-year college, and a public school district in the St. Cloud (MN) area addressed collaborative efforts in that community to decrease the achievement gap in immigrant students and students of color through the Access and Opportunity Center.

The Awareness, Aspirations, and Motivations track and the Financial Planning and Literacy track each addressed the need to educate parents, families, and students on strategies and methods to help students learn and prepare for college. The sessions in these tracks introduced participants to resources and examples of helpful materials to educate students and families on financial aid and the costs of college as well as the importance and economic enhancements that a college education provides to the individual. The Regional Education Laboratory (REL) Midwest sponsored and coordinated the Awareness, Aspirations, and Motivation track. In the first session Nicole Farmer Hurd, executive director of the National College Advising Corps, addressed the need to educate students early in their



high school years about the academic curricula and other steps they need to take in order to prepare properly for college. This includes knowing the important core courses that help prepare students for college and increasing student and family awareness of financial aid and the application process. Following Hurd, a panel of higher education institution and non-profit organization representatives introduced strategies and programs that employ to decrease the achievement gap and increase college success.

Iowa Student Loan sponsored and coordinated the Financial Planning and Literacy track. Marc Hendel, Senior Research Analyst with Iowa Student Loan, addressed the investment value of college and doubts in the general public of the economic returns of a college degree. Hendel provided data to demonstrate the economic and societal benefits to college degree attainment. Hendel also highlighted the consequences of college loan defaults for student borrowers and the decrease in quality of life that often occurs for borrowers with heavy debt burden. Hendel then moderated a panel of financial aid and college planning experts who discussed strategies for promoting financial literacy among prospective and current college students.

Day Two of the summit began with a session on parent and family engagement strategies with Jackie Starr of the Parents of Power Program in the Brooklyn Center (MN) School District, and Patty Montague of the Marist School (GA), who represented the National Association for College Admissions Counseling (NACAC). Both Starr and Montague focused on the need for the support of and engagement from families and parents to help foster student preparedness for college. Starr's presentation included a discussion of the consequences of inadequate schooling and preparation for students' academic futures. The target audience of the Parents of Power program is parents who need encouragement or education on how to assist their children towards academic success and college attendance. Montague introduced NACAC's guide of activities established to assist students from grade school to secondary school on the steps they need to take to gain access to and succeed in college.

Following Starr and Montague's presentations, Mark Hudson of Dell, provided examples of the influence of technology, specifically the Internet, on information gathering and learning. Hudson's presentation included an online participatory component using "back channel" technology. The use of this tool helped highlight the multiple layers of learning that students are accustomed to in today's digitally enhanced educational environment. Because of the increasingly global economy and demanding learning environments, as well as the ubiquitous presence of technology in most students' lives, Hudson emphasized that learning environments must adapt the influence of technology in how students obtain knowledge.

Following this session, Linda Baer, senior program officer with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, moderated a panel of local institutional leaders and student success professionals who discussed efforts to improve the readiness and success of incoming students, strategies for decreasing the achievement gap, and efforts to help students who require remediation upon entering college. The closing presentation was made by Jose Cruz of The Education Trust. The presentation, entitled "Replenishing Opportunity in America," highlighted existing gaps in achievement, opportunity, and access for low-income and minority students and presented examples of schools, districts, and universities that have narrowed or eliminated the achievement gap. Along with these examples, Cruz highlighted action strategies for advocates and stakeholders in the movement towards increasing access and success for all students. The closing presentation inspired attendees to reflect on the causes of achievement gaps and various strategies to decrease or eliminate those gaps. Cruz provided hope and inspiration to attendees for their return home.