

What's the value of College and Career Centers on high school campuses?

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A collection of student commentary from StudentsSpeakOut.org

During Summer 2007, Citizens League's StudentsSpeakOut.org hosted a "Students Take a Turn" Commentator Series, where students acted as commentators on the education-related ideas of high-profile adults in Minnesota. In their replies to various questions, students cited College and Career Centers on their campuses as important resources. The centers are run by Achieve!Minneapolis whose mission is "to galvanize community resources to help all Minneapolis Public School students succeed in school and become productive members of society."

Students regularly brought up that the **career centers** encourage them to succeed in their education and in their futures. The centers also provide access to services and equipment (like computers with Microsoft Word) that students would not otherwise have and for assistance in long term planning. This was especially true for a few participants who either have parents who do not speak English and/or do not have access to a computer at home.

Somali blogger Abdi Aynte, who is also a senior fellow/reporter at the Center for Independent Media, asked, "Do you have access to equal education both in the context of your high school or as you think about going to college?"

Mai-Eng Lee (Senior, Patrick Henry): "...there are so many opportunities for students of color to pursue higher education. This is because there is a **career center** that has computers and so many helpful staff to guide students to thinking about colleges. I think that the most important aspect of the **career centers** is not just access to equal education but, by attending a Minneapolis Public School in the Twin Cities, I have access to the **career centers** which make a huge impact to the colleges I'm applying to. With this I see it as my access to an education that no other students who's not a student of color will receive.

I actually find this rewarding and happier when thinking about my future because there are so many opportunities out there that all students of color need is that extra push. I feel that the access of getting to college in my school is quite equal to everyone because there are different kinds of students that make up the demographic of the school and we all value education as a key to being successful."

Gayle Smaller (Graduated in June, Patrick Henry), in response to a question from Minneapolis School Board Director Chris Stewart about what a state of the art high school might look like: "Then there is the public schools' lack of technology [Note: In a previous paragraph, Smaller had suggested that some students' attendance in school is related to access to programs that interest them, like Small Learning Communities related to the arts.]. Recently, they have added a few Mac computers to our schools mainly to help the online students take their classes. But these computers have also been placed in our **Career and College Centers** and they have made things easier for all of us to research colleges and type essays for these schools and I have to admit they have been a blessing..."

Sellano Simmons, MPS Parent Advisory Council representative for the North Side, asked, "Are you having conversations about college at school or home?" Some students clearly said "at home" or "a mix". The following two students answered "at school":

Mai-Eng Lee (Senior, Patrick Henry): "I definitely see that the conversation of college is being discussed at my school or in my classes. As a matter of fact in my school there is a **career/college center**, and it's open for all grade levels. This I found is a highly useful place because it helps prepare me with my college research and my future. I feel that the **center** has a lot of useful information, especially about scholarships and my future college. I see that not many people use this resource due to the fact that a lot of the time no one really encourages them to seek advice."

Shanaye Mitchell (Graduated in June, North): "... At school I had programs like Educational Talent Search (ETS), Upward Bound, and Admission Possible to really help me get started on choosing the right college for me verses the most inexpensive one"

Related Links

Achieve!Minneapolis: www.achieveminnneapolis.org

ABOUT STUDENTS SPEAK OUT:

StudentsSpeakOut.org is an initiative of the Citizens League Minnesota 150th Anniversary Project (MAP 150). MAP 150's purpose is to find ways of cultivating citizens' ability to participate in designing public solutions by developing new spaces and roles that respect citizens' experiences and ideas as relevant to the policy discussion. People affected by the problem should be included in defining it. StudentsSpeakOut.org is a project whose face is a social networking Web site. We are testing a variety of strategies for involving young people as active citizens by meeting them where they are (on the Web, using technology, and in both school-based and outside-of-school learning environments). The Web site was at first Minneapolis-focused, and has now expanded to all of Minnesota and Milwaukee, with potential for further expansion nationally.

There are forum discussions where students and adults raise questions and discuss ideas for solutions. We've "turned the tables" and asked students to act as commentators on the education-related ideas of high-profile adults in Minnesota. The Web site was also the host of the "I Am Minnesota's Future" Video Contest, a pilot-level contest providing a forum for students to articulate what adults and youth must do to ensure a better future in Minnesota.

There is a lot of behind-the-scenes work, too, that occurs to cultivate active citizenship and bring the site to life. For example: Student leaders from Minneapolis and from Minnesota's alternative-education programs have project coordinators who assist them in investigating topics of their choice on video and in written story, and who connect the students to decision-makers working in their scope of interest.

In Milwaukee, students learn how to use the site to address education matters they care about via workshops, and adults participate in separate workshops to learn how to support the students on the site. The workshop designs and in-person recruiting strategies built on the successes of Minnesota's site, and the strategies are succeeding (as evidenced by rapid growth of site participation—almost 80 new participants since its launch in mid-April 2008.)

There are a number of strategies for facilitating more dialogue amongst students regarding suspensions and expulsions, and other issues affecting students, using the site's discussion forums and cultivating student leaders to run the discussion. Most important to the students' willingness to participate is their trusting that there is an audience willing to consider their ideas. If that's you, and you would like to know more about working with Students Speak Out to involve students in your work, contact us: studentspeakout@map150.org

