



USU

Coalition of
Urban Serving Universities

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Human Capital: Creating Birth to Career Educational Success Pipelines for our Urban Settings

Introduction

In the 21st century age where knowledge, information, creativity and innovation are the primary driving forces of the worldwide economy, a college degree has become absolutely essential to a lifetime of career success and quality of life. Yet a myriad of reports indicate that a significant portion of the U.S. citizenry does not complete the education needed to provide them with that all-important ladder to success.

Every nine seconds a student drops out of school in the United States. In 2004, over 6 million (6,277,000) of our 18- to 24-year-olds had not completed high school. If GED holders were excluded and the adult population over age 24 included, the non-completion rate would be much higher. In a recent special report, *Time* magazine employed a 30% dropout rate, acknowledging the many youngsters who leave prior to even entering high school. Dropout rates are even higher in many urban communities where our universities are located. For example, urban African American students had a graduation rate in 2004 of 50% and Latinos 53%, contrasted with 75% of Caucasians. High school students from low-income families (lowest quintile) drop out at six times the rate of their peers in the highest quintile. Nearly half of these dropouts are unemployed and the great majority of the rest are in minimum wage positions; further, recent immigrants are displacing high school dropouts in entry-level positions. Secretary of Education Spellings recently estimated that dropouts cost the U.S. more than \$260 *billion* in lost wages, taxes, and productivity. Over a lifetime, an 18-year-old who does not complete high school earns about \$260,000 less than an individual with a high school diploma. Dropouts are far more likely to commit crimes and be incarcerated than those with more education. In contrast, high school diploma recipients live longer, have better indicators of general health, and are less likely to use publicly financed health-insurance programs.

The Problem

There are multiple out-of-school factors as well as policies, practices and conditions in schools which contribute to this tragic situation. The former includes housing, health, family income and stability, transportation, and safety. The Anne E. Casey Foundation (1998) has identified six family risk factors which detract from the long-term healthy development of a child: child not living with two parents; household head is a high school dropout; family income is below the poverty line; child living with parents who do not have steady, full-time employment; family receiving welfare benefits; and child does not have health insurance. Twenty-six percent of 16- to 19-year-olds with four or more of

these risk factors were high school dropouts in 1998, contrasted with only 1 percent of teens with none of these risk factors. The latter includes the lack of qualified teachers in every classroom and a shortage of rigorous coursework. Urban universities, and especially colleges of education, working in strong, systemic partnerships with P-12 schools and other community agencies, are uniquely qualified to provide leadership in redressing many of the sources of the dropout problem; those that reside outside of as well as those within schools. They have the capacity to respond more directly to preparing qualified teachers, administrators, counselors, and even teacher aides in programs designed specifically for *urban* high poverty schools and with an emphasis on science and mathematics.

Solution

True educational reform is about a pipeline that begins early and lasts for a lifetime. Pipeline reform requires investment from key agencies engaged in simultaneous renewal, rather than a narrower approach. A decade of efforts has taught us that most schools cannot live up to the demands of the new reforms because they do not know how and the systems do not support them in doing so.

A number of in-school (as well as out-of-school) factors have been identified that are primary determinants of student academic success by the Center for Urban Education at the University of Cincinnati. This breakthrough model was done on behalf of a community coalition called **Strive**, an education partnership focused on empowering every child to succeed from birth through graduation from college or career training. An examination of the roadmap they developed might be helpful in determining priorities for reform. The **Strive** Student Roadmap to Success is organized around the impact of high-quality teachers and schools organized for success (above the timeline) and around high-quality social services for youngsters and their families (below the timeline). Those using this roadmap in Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky are working together to better organize these resources to promote efficiency and effectiveness around priority areas that challenge students' educational development and help them to achieve success. Many members of the Urban Serving Universities also have formed significant and systemic partnerships designed to improve the education pipeline. They understand that in order to make significant inroads in extending the education of tens of thousands of urban youngsters, they must work in strong, sustaining partnerships with their urban K-12 school districts, teachers' unions, and other key community stakeholders to achieve success. The Strive model can be applied to enhance the work that is already being done through these universities and to expand these efforts to other institutions.

Implementation

The **Strive** pathway offers a challenge to leaders across all different sectors to align education systems and community resources to ensure that all students meet these benchmarks. Fourteen USU member institutions are already engaged in similar collaborative projects. Their efforts could benefit from the lessons of the **Strive** model. By using this roadmap as a model adapted to individual communities' needs, urban areas from regions across the country can rise to the challenge of creating a true education system that enables every child to succeed, from birth through career(s).