

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

Opportunity Network

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Gateway to College Instructional Site Visit Summary May 31, 2017

Provider: Community College of Philadelphia
Contract Term: FY 2013-FY 2017
Program Capacity: 125

Site Visit Date: Friday, April 21, 2017- 10:00 a.m.
IEP Compliance: 100%
Average Daily Attendance: 94.3%

Review Team:

Christina Grant, Assistant Superintendent
Dr. Wanda Jenkins, Director Operations
Sithi Pardeshi, Program Manager, School Reform Commission

Program Staff:

Dr. David Thomas, Associate Vice President, Strategic Initiatives; Dean, Access and Community Engagement
Timeka Ford-Smith, Director, Gateway to College

Overview of Instructional Site Visits:

Instructional site visits consisted of four main parts: **Academic Success Questions with Leadership**; **Academic Success Questions with Teachers**; **Academic Success Questions with Students**; and **Classroom Observations**. **Academic Success Questions with Leadership** was driven by standardized questions that focused on: data and academic outcomes; academic outcomes versus goals; and preparation for classroom observations. **Academic Success Questions with Teachers** was driven by standardized questions that focused on: the use of academic assessments; academic outcomes versus goals; and the school's overall academic performance. **Academic Success Questions with Students** was driven by standardized questions that focused on: student backgrounds and previous educational experiences; academic expectations set by Teachers; tests, grading procedures, and supports from Teachers; overall level of satisfaction with the program and recommendations for improvement; the program's mission; the program's Special Education services; and food and health services. **Classroom Observations** was guided by a standardized Classroom Observation Form that assessed elements of: the classroom environment; instruction; and assessments.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Academic Success Questions with Leadership

Gateway to College leadership discussed its use of the Accuplacer diagnostic and placement examination. The Accuplacer is used to determine which skill areas students may need additional help with. The exam is also administered after interventions have been provided in order to determine how well students improved in those skill areas. Gateway to College students have access to all courses offered at the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP) for which they have met prerequisite requirements.

Gateway to College leadership discussed some of the biggest challenges that they face in the program. Retention was noted as a major challenge. The program implements a number of sound strategies to engage students who become disengaged. Strategies and documented efforts include: communication with faculty; use of the early alert system; daily check-ins that inform attendance; phone calls/text messages/emails made to students; home visits in response to attendance and truancy issues; and student referrals to the SAT Team for interventions. Morning check-in, class transitions, and dismissal were not observed during this visit but were observed weeks prior. The Gateway to College Director checks in with students often via the program's Breakfast Club and conferment with Academic Coordinators. Students often face personal challenges that are not easily combated

with program support. For example, students who are homeless and lack a stable living environment will often disengage due to their life circumstances.

Program leadership acknowledged that their year-over-year attendance rates are higher than those of traditional CCP students. Leadership attributed this to the intensive supports that they provide for their Gateway to College students. Program staff encourage students tremendously and celebrate even the smallest progress that students make.

Classroom Observation

Review team members observed the Gateway to College Hip Hop Class; seven students were present in class during the observation. The Instructor led and assisted students in a discussion that was rooted within the context of hip hop music and other areas of modern-day American culture. The Instructor utilized various materials to engage students with the content: an LCD projector displayed key concepts for the lesson; video clips were played to spur discussion and help students make connections; and hip hop lyrics were analyzed for meaning and metaphors. The Instructor challenged students to demonstrate understanding, analyze, apply, synthesize, and evaluate multiple information sources.

Academic Success Questions with Academic Coordinators

Gateway to College's Academic Coordinators participated in the instructional site visit. They discussed the services and supports that they provide to students, and their overall role within the program. Academic Coordinators talked about providing wraparound services for students, and each has a caseload of students that they are responsible for serving. They contact students daily via text, email, or telephone when students are not present on campus. Academic Coordinators described the outreach they provide to parents/guardians, including home visits when necessary. They check in with professors on a bi-weekly basis regarding student attendance and academic performance. They talked about having the goal of continuously building relationships with professors, and professors are typically pleased to have the support of Academic Coordinators. Students meet with their Academic Coordinators once each week to review class assignments. Academic Coordinators ensure that students are only taking classes that fulfill School District high school diploma requirements. Academic Coordinators analyze credit profiles in order to register students for eligible courses. The Academic Coordinators reported using many hands-on approaches to engage students, monitor their progress, and provide them with necessary supports. The program's Breakfast Club held every morning is an example of how Academic Coordinators engage students with food, conversation, and encouragement.

Academic Success Questions with Students

Gateway to College leadership selected five students to participate in the Academic Success Questions with Students. The students' grade spans ranged from 11th grade to 12th grade, and their expectant graduation dates ranged from May 2017 to Fall 2017. One of the students had been enrolled in the program since 2015 and will graduate with both a high school diploma and Associate's degree in the fall.

Students discussed their Academic Coordinators with members of the review team. They talked about Academic Coordinators contributing so much to their growth and development on a personal level. One student referred to Academic Coordinator Betty Handy as "Mom Betty", and credited Ms. Handy with being one of the first people she has ever opened to. The student acknowledged that Ms. Handy provided her with opportunities that she herself was not aware that she actually wanted. Students noted how Academic Coordinators care about them and they can tell when something is wrong with a student. In those circumstances, Academic Coordinators will talk with students and support them in any way possible. Students viewed their Academic Coordinators as being very encouraging, which has helped them to build confidence.

Overall, students considered Gateway to College to be a better school option for them in comparison to their previous school experiences. They referred to Gateway as being different and better for them. Students recommend that the School District expand Gateway to College so that more students can take advantage of the program. They also recommended that the School District invest in staff like Academic Coordinators who have the capacity to support and encourage students to continue with their education. Students thought that the program should not be limited only to students who dropout of school, but that all students should have the option to enroll in a program like Gateway to College.

Debrief

The review team noted that Gateway to College students are very self-aware. The review team credited the program's supportive structures (Academic Coordinators, Breakfast Club, etc.) with helping students to achieve such high levels of self-awareness. The program's Hip Hop class afforded students with a unique opportunity to philosophically engage with popular culture while examining and analyzing high level themes and concepts. Gateway to College leadership noted that a major challenge they have encountered is students completing the FAFSA in order to receive financial aid. Program leadership recommended that a transition liaison be added to the Opportunity Network in order to support programs with postsecondary preparation and bridging, which includes FAFSA completion supports.