

COLLEGE ACCESS CHALLENGE GRANT PROGRAM

Executive Summaries from Annual Performance Reports

Below are state executive summaries that were submitted as part of the annual performance report under the College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) program. These summaries represent the implementation of activities and services during the FY 2008 reporting period of August 14, 2008 – April 15, 2009.

ALASKA

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Executive Summary:

Alaska's college-going rate is among the lowest in the nation and policymakers face significant obstacles as they attempt to create a college-going culture, particularly among low-income or first-generation students and their families. The ultimate goal of Alaska's College Access Challenge (CACG) project is to increase the number of high school students who graduate and who enroll in and complete postsecondary education.

After a 2007 report from the Institute for Higher Education Policy recommended the establishment of a peer mentor program in the state as one strategy to increase college access, the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE) partnered with the Anchorage School District (ASD) and the University of Alaska (UA) to develop and implement a pilot College/Career Guide mentoring program at Robert Service High School.

In addition to fostering multiple state partnerships, ACPE also partnered with the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) to administer Alaska's grant and provide ongoing technical assistance and program evaluation. Alaska's participation in WICHE's CACG Consortium allows project leaders to share information and best practices related to college access with other western grantees.

Basing its pilot program on the National College Advising Corps "near peer" model, Alaska has successfully recruited, hired, trained, and integrated two College/Career Guides into the pilot location. Both guides are recent University of Alaska Anchorage graduates and offer a unique perspective that supplements and enhances current counseling activities at Service High.

Services to students began on March 2, 2009 and the project is already making an impact after only 45 days of operation. To date, 1,208 students at Service High have received outreach

services ranging from individualized college and career advising to information about financial aid and college entrance exams.

Currently the College/Career Guides are administering the Universal Encouragement online survey to the entire student body in order to establish program baseline data about their attitudes, values, and planning for education beyond high school. College/Career Guides have also surveyed over 50 percent of high school seniors regarding their current education and career plans. These student body surveys and interviews will produce ongoing data, which will track college access and success at the pilot location as the project moves forward.

Information about postsecondary preparation, planning, and career exploration has also been provided to students in the form of classroom presentations, program marketing, and a financial aid night organized by ACPE and hosted by Service High. College/Career Guides also participated in a Service High organized all-day career fair aimed at low-income/first-generation students. One hundred and eight English as a Second Language (ESL) and non-college preparatory track students received seven additional classroom visits from the College/Career Guides in an effort to explain the importance and benefits of college participation and completion. Service High students have also received greater exposure to the Alaska Career Information System (AKCIS), a Web-based information tool designed to help teens and adults explore career and educational opportunities in Alaska and throughout the United States, as a result of College/Career Guide efforts.

Besides the services provided directly to students by the College/Career Guides, ACPE has created a comprehensive database to track program activity and success. This database could possibly serve as a template for a tool capable of tracking college participation and completion across the entire state. ACPE has also convened an internal workgroup of 15 key stakeholders comprised of state and national partners which meets every two weeks for the purpose of guiding and refining the development and implementation of the pilot program. A statewide College Access Advisory Team, which was instrumental in the creation of the initial CACG program design, was recently reconvened for an ACPE-sponsored webinar updating CACG activities. This group of key business, community, education, and government leaders will continue to play a major role in the program's expansion and sustainability.

In addition to the general lack of a college-going culture in the State of Alaska, the demographics of Service High pose significant obstacles to the goal of increasing college enrollment during the pilot phase of the project. Service High has the most diverse student body in the district and current postsecondary enrollment data for the school show a steady decline over the past three school years, from roughly 70 percent in 2005-2006 to 55 percent in 2007-2008. Reversing this trend is going to be a challenge, but the alignment of CACG and ACPE college access goals has the potential to change current attitudes and values towards education beyond high school not only at Service High, but across the entire state.

ALABAMA

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Executive Summary:

The Alabama College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) project is following a timeline of activities developed by the Steering Committee, stakeholders, and the Alabama Department of Education. To date the Steering Committee has met twice. The first meeting was used to familiarize the participants with the elements of the grant, develop a plan of action to determine additional participation possibilities by the stakeholder members, and determine utilization of existing resources that would support the objectives of the grant. Subcommittees were established in the following areas: evaluation; professional development counseling; communication and marketing; and financial literacy. Subcommittees outlined ways to implement the activities of the grant. The Communication and Marketing Subcommittee determined there was not sufficient time or staff to adequately implement the activities as outlined in the communication plan for distribution of information and materials related to the grant. Permission was requested and granted for the release of a bid RFP (request for proposal) to hire a professional marketing firm.

The greatest challenge to the implementation of the grant objectives has been the economic downturn and the current hiring freeze in Alabama. The activities of the grant are ongoing. The Web portal has been established and is in place for use by stakeholders. The Counselor Transition Skill Development course in its generic form is complete. Alabama is currently completing the fine-tuning of the components of the course for the state.

An RFP was released to postsecondary and higher education institutions to develop workshops for sharing information and skills for completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for students and parents. Up to 24 grants will be awarded for completion prior to September 30, 2009. This activity is targeted to the class of 2009 who have not completed the FAFSA prior to May 1, 2009.

The development of the Web portal for Alabama has been the major activity of the grant. This site provides information and/or links to information on financial aid in the colleges and universities in the state, tutorial programs for the FAFSA completion, the FAFSA Web site, the Alabama Department of Labor for employment potential, and links to career development information. The Web site houses links to information for students, parents, counselors, and educators.

ARIZONA

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Executive Summary:

The Arizona College Access Aid Program (ACAAP) is designed to increase the persistence of low-income sophomore, junior or senior college students through completion of a baccalaureate degree by filling the gaps in state-level aid. Students must be seeking an associate or baccalaureate degree at any regionally- or nationally-accredited institution. Funds are limited and awarded on a first-come, first-served basis at the time of application completion. The maximum award is \$2,000 per academic year. Funds can be used to defray any educational expenses (direct or indirect) documented in the student's Cost of Attendance (COA) at the institution.

The Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education (ACPE) was asked to administer \$500,000 in student grant funds each year over the next two academic years. This equates to approximately 240 full-time student grant awards per academic year. In an effort to strengthen the ACAAP program, the Arizona Special Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (SLEAP) funds are being administered in conjunction with ACAAP to maximize fund availability for low-income students. The Commission staff began working in the summer of 2008 with the Governor's Office to finalize the grant program details. Once the details were set in place, work began on building an online semi-automatic student application. The student application is on AZ Grants student financial aid portal at www.azgrants.gov. The student application for ACAAP is incorporated into the existing State Grant applications, providing one seamless application process for students. The student application went live November 24, 2008 along with SLEAP grant application.

To date over 2,000 applications have been received for ACAAP for the 2008-2009 academic year. All ACAAP funds for 2008-2009 have been exhausted. The ACPE staff continues to promote the ACAAP programs at higher education institutions, college access programs, and high schools.

Arizona College Scholarship Foundation (ACSF)

The Arizona College Scholarship Foundation (ACSF) was awarded \$117,782 in grant funds each year for the next two years to create and manage the Arizona College Access Coalition. The Coalition will be composed of program or organizations representing college, universities, community-based, school districts and other college access programs that provide services consistent with the federal grant guidelines.

- Created branding and online look and feel for college access network;

- Convened advisory group to review look, feel and features of the College Access Coalition portal;
- Built “backend” of online portal for Arizona College Access Coalition;
- Preparing to launch portal this month;
- Planning first College Access Coalition meeting – date to be determined, likely mid-October;
- Developing marketing and communication strategy for announcement of and invitation to join Coalition.

Low-Income Families Grant Program

Arizona awarded approximately \$500,000 in sub-grants each year for the next two years to eleven Arizona non-profit organizations to fund local and regional college access programs. Award of the grants was made through a competitive process to organizations that would provide one or more of the following services:

- College information and preparation services to students and families;
- Information on financing options for postsecondary education and activities that promote financial literacy and debt management among students and families;
- Outreach activities for students who may be at risk of not enrolling in or completing postsecondary education; assistance in completion of the FAFSA; or
- Professional development for guidance counselors at middle schools and secondary schools, and financial aid administrators and college admissions counselors at institutions of higher education.

Coordination with State-Level Communications Activities

Focusing on the future of education on our state, Expect More Arizona, a nonpolitical public-private partnership is launching a multi-year effort to create a statewide movement of Arizonans who value education as Arizona’s top priority. The \$2 million public awareness and engagement effort asks people to join the cause by going to ExpectMoreArizona.org. As a prelude to the statewide mass media component of the campaign, which starts in early May, partners are hosting a series of “Open Microphone” events at five high schools across the state.

What makes this pro-education effort unique is its emphasis on the entire education continuum – Early Learning, K-12 and Postsecondary – and its multi-year, multi-faceted approach which includes advertising, online and social media, public relations and grassroots outreach strategies. Expect More Arizona intends to make education Arizona’s top priority by educating Arizonans about the importance of the entire education continuum, spanning birth through career; increasing public awareness of the issues affecting education in Arizona and their impact on individuals, local communities and our state; and providing Arizonans with opportunities to be actively involved in strengthening education.

Expect More Arizona is governed by an oversight board including representatives from the Arizona Community Foundation, Arizona School Boards Association, Arizona State University, First Things First, Helios Education Foundation, Northern Arizona University, Rodel Charitable

Foundation of Arizona, University of Arizona and the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust. Each organization represented has committed \$100,000 or more to the statewide effort.

P-20 Programs

Over the past few years, driven by the collaborative foundation of the P-20 Council, Arizona has accelerated efforts to strengthen and reform its education system. The council brought together key stakeholders, including policy-making boards and political leaders to drive initiatives supporting support college- and career-ready policies. These initiatives include: (1) increasing graduation requirements; (2) aligning and strengthening standards; (3) increasing pathways for student success; (4) pursuing the development of a robust data system; and (5) addressing issues of teacher attraction, training, retention and professional development. In support of the P-20 Council's overarching goal to ensure "Arizonans have the educational opportunities, skills and knowledge needed to compete, contribute and succeed in the 21st century economy," Arizona aspires that *all* high school graduates will complete a rigorous course of study that best prepares them for successfully completing, without remediation, a postsecondary pathway leading to certification, associate and/or bachelor degree completion. Policy supporting the accountability, assessment and support systems will be driven by a commitment to inform teaching and positively impact student learning. Multiple measures will be employed to determine P-20 systemic success in graduating high school students' college- and career-ready including, but not limited to, an increase in the high school graduation rate while pursuing a rigorous course of study; an assessment system that indicates student preparedness for credit bearing college coursework or the workforce, and an increase in the number of students entering and completing a postsecondary education program. This work is currently being driven by Arizona's participation in Achieve's College and Career Ready policy Institute; the National Governor's Association's Career and Technical Education Policy Academy; and Lumina's Making Opportunities Affordable Planning Grant. The project manager for the CACG plays a key role in linking these initiatives.

ARKANSAS

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Executive Summary:

The Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) solicited bids from area advertising agencies for a statewide campaign designed to promote and highlight the value of a postsecondary education. A proposal from a Little Rock-based advertising agency was selected by a committee.

Subsequently an advertising and activity campaign known as "Say Go College Week" was launched beginning February 16, 2009 and lasting through February 22, 2009, ending with College Goal Sunday. Two weeks prior to "Say Go College Week" 433 toolkits were mailed to every public and private high school and workforce service center in Arkansas. The toolkits contained buttons, activity posters, banners, video contest posters, student stickers, and college myth-busting worksheets.

Arkansas' Governor kicked off "Say Go College Week" with a highly successful press conference, which garnered good coverage by the media in central Arkansas and was subsequently picked up by statewide media.

A list of suggested activities for "Say Go College Week" began with a "Say Go Rally" on Monday. The suggested activity on Tuesday was College Myth Busting Day designed to explode some of the myths that might inhibit high school students from attending college. Students were encouraged to wear t-shirts or sweatshirts of their chosen college on Wednesday.

College Rants Video Day was Thursday during which students were encouraged to submit videos they created for the YouTube video contest telling everyone why a college education is important to them. Friday was "Commit to Go Day" and students were encouraged to sign a banner making a commitment to attend College Goal Sunday, have a discussion with their parents about college, or submit college financial aid/admissions paperwork.

The paid media campaign began January 5, 2009 and lasted through February 22, 2009. The campaign included radio and television spots, print advertising, and service station pump posters promoting "Say Go College Week." The governor also created a "Say Go College Week" Web site, saygocollege.com, which attracted over 4,500 unique visitors in four months.

Two- and four-year postsecondary institutions were also encouraged to participate in "Say Go College Week" by hosting campus tours for prospective students.

An outcome of the campaign was a 47 percent increase in the percentage of high school seniors who completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) on College Goal Sunday.

Volunteers for College Goal Sunday assisted 1,603 students in completing the FAFSA application. Last year's event resulted in 1,133 filed FAFSA applications.

One of the lessons learned is the challenges faced in putting together a statewide campaign in a short time span. The "Say Go College Week" campaign was new to high schools and postsecondary institutions; therefore, getting the information out to the schools and persuading them to participate was a daunting task. To increase participation next year plans are to announce the dates of "Say Go College Week" prior to the close of schools for the summer so that the week will be on their calendars for the 2009-2010 school year.

Now that "Say Go College Week" has been branded, the level of participation will greatly increase next year.

In order to improve the effectiveness of college advice given to students in the poorest counties in the state, the obvious place to start is with the advisors – high school counselors located in the Tier 4 counties in Arkansas. Tier 4 counties are 20 counties assigned a rating by the Arkansas Economic Development Commission with ratings calculated using unemployment rate, per capita income, poverty rate, population growth/decline.

Counselors from the Tier 4 high schools were invited to a free workshop presented by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education entitled "Bridges Out of Poverty." This workshop provides educators working with people in poverty with an understanding of how the world of the poor student is different. The sessions include workshops on understanding the culture and values of poverty, teaching students the hidden rules of middle class as a choice for navigating the college systems, and how services can be improved through a better understanding of student perceptions.

"Bridges Out of Poverty" was presented to 24 counselors from Tier 4 high schools by ADHE on the campus of East Arkansas Community College in Forrest City. As part of the workshop, ADHE also made a presentation on financial aid. In addition to the Forrest City workshop, all Tier 4 county high school counselors have been invited to attend a counselor pre-conference "Bridges Out of Poverty" workshop that will be held in June in Little Rock. Non-Tier 4 high school counselors can also attend the workshop.

An outcome of this effort is to increase the college-going rate for students at Tier 4 high schools by three percent by 2010. This outcome will be evaluated during the second year of the College Access Challenge Grant.

The high schools located in the Tier 4 counties of Arkansas were invited to apply for a \$25,000 award to develop or improve upon the academic preparation activities in their respective schools. An Academic Preparation Committee selected four applications from 17 entries. The schools selected were Blytheville High School, Crossett High School, East Poinsett High School, and Star City High School. The schools were required to partner with an institution of higher education and a local Chamber of Commerce, civic group or non-profit. The selected schools are currently implementing activities that include the following:

Blytheville High School – An "advanced placement boot camp" for Advanced Placement (AP) Literature, American History, Chemistry and Statistics is being held on several evenings leading

to the AP testing. A campus visit for both students and their parents to nearby Arkansas State University was made on May 1, 2009.

Crossett High School – The school has current enrollment of 591 students in grades 9-12 with 41 percent identified as being from low socioeconomic home environments. Crossett High School has targeted this group for special assistance in preparing for a postsecondary education. Activities include individual and group counseling, after school study sessions, study materials, and transportation.

East Poinsett High School (EPHS) – EPHS students have performed below the state average on the ACT test for the past three years. The school's goal is to increase average ACT scores to 22 by, among other things, providing professional development of school staff and by developing curriculum based on ACT recommended standards.

Star City High School – The school district is located in Lincoln County, one of the poorest counties in the nation. The school is partnering with nearby University of Arkansas at Monticello to provide guidance and supplemental services, such as additional instruction in English, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science during the summer.

The desired outcome for these activities is to increase the number of students who choose to take a more rigorous curriculum (Arkansas Smart Core) and enroll in AP courses in participating schools. This data will be gathered at the conclusion of each academic year.

CALIFORNIA

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Executive Summary:

As indicated in our application, California's proposal was to fund partnership programs that provide a combination of comprehensive early college access and career opportunity awareness activities to students and their families and to increase the number of low-income high school seniors completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The \$7,676,868 College Access Challenge Grant Program (CACG) funds were appropriated in California's 2008-09 Budget Act to fund the California Student Aid Commission's (Commission) California Student Opportunity and Access Program (Cal-SOAP) and the Cash for College (CFC) Program at \$7,349,000 and \$329,868, respectively. Following is a summary of the delivery mechanisms utilized for dissemination of funds and program overview:

Cal-SOAP operates through 15 locally governed consortia throughout the state. These regional partnership programs in high need geographic regions of California successfully delivered a comprehensive menu of general and intensive activities to students and families regarding postsecondary college. In addition, Career Technical Education (CTE) information delivery was coordinated in partnership with the California Community College Office of the Chancellor (CCCCO), the California Department of Education (CDE) & School District Collaboratives.

Cal-SOAP services were provided on two levels: intensive services and general services. Intensive services are one-on-one and small group activities conducted with program participants consistently throughout the academic year. General services utilized an event platform open to low income schools or and surrounding communities at large. Each regional Cal-SOAP project was required to collect and report student data to the Commission using a statewide student information system. Projects collected demographic and program eligibility information on Cal-SOAP participants, as well as program services information. In addition, projects used surveys and questionnaires to collect information on activity implementation, participation and impact.

Through March 31, 2009, Cal-SOAP has provided information to thousands of students and parents on the availability of college and career opportunity information and financial aid programs and opportunities to fund college and career technical education.

State law required \$1 million of the Cal-SOAP funding to be spent on CTE activities approved by the Commission after consultation with CDE and CCC. The funds were ultimately distributed in two phases with the second phase just approved in April 2009. Consequently, the Cal-SOAP project directors will not be able to expend all of these funds by August 13, 2009 and an extension to carry-over the 2008-09 CACG funds is being requested.

California Cash for College (CFC), a Commission partnership program established in statute in 2007 by legislation, assisted low-income high school students and their families across California in successfully completing the college financial aid application process to pursue education and career technical education beyond high school.

Six existing Regional Coordinating Organizations (RCO) are directed and supported by the CFC Program, and are responsible for conducting all planning and coordination of workshops within the far North State, Capitol area, East Bay, Bakersfield, Los Angeles and San Diego regions. The RCOs are required to have demonstrated experience in assisting low-income youth access financial aid for education beyond high school, and have demonstrated capacity in establishing resources to match planning and implementation funds provided by CFC. The RCOs are required to keep auditable records and report regional progress at monthly statewide advisory committee meetings. Statewide evaluation results are disaggregated by region and analyzed at bi-annually strategic planning sessions.

One-on-one, multi-lingual assistance on the FAFSA was provided at over 500 hundred student financial aid workshops. More than 2,000 campus financial aid staff, high school counselors, and trained community volunteers assisted students and families at the workshops. The highly leveraged partnership brought together high schools, college campuses from all segments of higher education, community, business, and local government organizations to help low-income youth.

CFC is now in the process of awarding scholarships throughout the State of California, through a generous grant from the College Access Foundation of California. Since 2005, College Access Foundation of California has awarded more than \$3 million in scholarship funding to the Cash for College program. Recently, CFC was awarded an additional \$2.9 million in scholarship and program funding for 2009-10 scholarships and to provide program support to participate in a national study of performance based scholarships conducted by a leading research firm, MDRC, and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

CFC held over 550 workshops statewide and assisted over 26,000 students with completing the FAFSA. The CFC program will be evaluating responses to a student exit survey that is returned to the statewide program office for validation and processing. The CFC student exit survey collected student information used to track FAFSA and state applications through the Commission's grant delivery system and functioned as the student's scholarship program entry form.

California's match to the CACG is in the form of loan assumption payments through the Commission's Assumption Program of Loans for Education (APLE). The Commission is currently processing the loan repayments to teachers employed in high need subject matter and geographic areas, and low-income/low-performing schools. The Commission has already approved over \$12 million in APLE payments for 2008-2009.

COLORADO

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Executive Summary:

Colorado College Access Challenge Grant (CCACG) application proposed spending funds for three professional staff and a part-time intern to conduct CollegeInvest (CI) and College In Colorado (CIC) outreach activities on the Western Slope of Colorado, to coordinate CI and CIC events throughout the state, and to manage the web creation and delivery of a financial literacy curriculum. As an additional resource for the targeted population, funds were budgeted for the purchase of Choices Planner, a software college planning tool for adults and for the start-up of a financial literacy program placing higher education financing within the context of overall financial health for low-income families.

To support the Colorado Counselor Corps, funds were set aside for a loan forgiveness program for counselors working in low-income middle and high schools in districts receiving Counselor Corps Grant funds, and the remainder of the funding was for grants for low-income students.

As the grant was awarded after the beginning of the state fiscal year, some of these activities will be delayed until the State Fiscal Year (FY) 2010. There will be carry-forward funds for FY 2010 from FY 2009.

Accomplishments to date are the following:

- Education cents, the financial literacy Web site, is ready for June testing with a September launch date;
- Choices Planner has been purchased and will be launched in June;
- Twenty-five applications for loan forgiveness through the Counselor Corps loan forgiveness program have been received; and
- There has been an increase in outreach activities for CI and CIC both on the Western Slope and across the state with presentations in nearly all Western Slope school districts and an overall increase in presentations across Colorado.

The major challenge with this program was creating and implementing a successful grant program as the school year was commencing. To address this challenge, we delayed the implementation of the federal portion of grants until State FY 2010. Scholarship funds will be carried forward to award in FY 2010 and the next fiscal year, if necessary.

CONNECTICUT

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Executive Summary:

The Connecticut Department of Higher Education in partnership with Housatonic Community College implemented the following activities and services to assist underrepresented students in surmounting college access and success barriers:

Full-time, first-time underrepresented, low-income students have been placed into developmental English (ENG043) and Intermediate Algebra (MAT137) or higher. Twenty-five students are currently enrolled in Connections.

Project Components and Outcomes:

Specialized Orientation: Participants received a specialized orientation emphasizing high expectations for their academic success. Bi-weekly meetings and activities take place throughout the semester to reinforce the message of high expectations for academic success. Meetings also are used as a time for students to connect with each other.

Block Scheduling: Participants were block-scheduled in their Math and English Courses in the fall 2008 semester and college level English Composition (ENG101) in the spring 2009 semester.

Supplemental Instruction and Tutoring: Participants were provided with supplemental instruction in Math and English facilitated by Housatonic Community College professors in fall 2008 and spring 2009. Tutors were provided at various one-hour blocks of time during the week for additional academic assistance.

Peer Mentoring: Participants received professional mentor training from the Mentoring for Academic Achievement and College Success (MAACS) program of the Bridgeport Public Education Fund to prepare for their mentor role. The participants also received mentor guidebooks from the Governor's Prevention Partnership. Additional mentoring workshops and training are planned for the students during the remainder of the semester.

Stipends: Students receive a "work-study" type stipend during fall 2008 and spring 2009. During the fall semester, students were assigned to work in the various college departments to understand the functions of the College and build relationships with faculty and staff. In spring 2009, students participated in mentoring workshops and training to prepare for the role of mentor with high school freshmen at a local high school. Participants also have volunteered for events and activities at the college throughout the semester as part of their stipend.

Proposed Outcomes:

- Twenty-five percent differential in the number of project participants who persist in their year-to-year enrollment at the college, compared to the project's control group;
- Thirty-three percent differential in the number of successful course completions by project participants in comparison to the Project's control group.
Successful course completion is defined as = C or Higher
Fall 08: The Connections group attempted 101 courses and successfully completed 76 (completion rate = 75.2 percent [$76/101=75.2$ percent]).
The comparison group attempted 102 courses and successfully completed 87 (completion rate = 85.3 percent [$87/102=85.3$ percent]).
There is a 10.1 percent differential between these groups, where the Comparison group exceeds the Connections group; and
- Forty percent differential in the number of project's participating students who have or who are positioned to graduate and/or transfer from HCC to a four-year institution in comparison to the Project's control group.

Successes:

Student Engagement: Through participation in Connections, students are more engaged in the College and spending more time on campus through a variety of activities including regular meetings, training and workshops, volunteer assignments and work study activities.

Goal Setting: Thirty-two percent of students without a declared major during their first semester have declared or are planning to declare a major during the spring 2009 semester.

Student Retention: Ninety-six percent of Connections students persisted from fall to spring. The one student that withdrew in the fall semester returned in the spring semester. Current enrollment is 100 percent.

Stipends: The stipend is an excellent incentive and motivator for the students. However, there is a clear expectation of all the students that the stipend must be earned. This expectation is demonstrated through maintaining satisfactory progress in coursework, regular classroom and meeting attendance and participation in all scheduled activities and workshops.

Student Satisfaction: Overall, there is a sense of strong satisfaction among the students and the idea of being part of something special and important. By receiving additional support and guidance, they are truly learning more and participating in a productive manner.

Challenges:

Supplemental Instruction: It was very difficult to implement this component during the first semester. Attendance was very low or not at all. Individual tutoring appointments have worked much better for this group of students.

Student Distractions: For a number of these students, "life gets in the way" of them maintaining a successful college experience.

FAFSA FIRST (FAFSA - Free Application for Federal Student Aid)

Intended Programs:

Co-Opportunity, VITA FAFSA Completion Assistance
FAFSA Preparation Workshops
FAFSA Completion Workshops
Guidance Counselor Workshop

The following programs have been fully implemented: Co-Opportunity VITA FAFSA Completion Assistance, FAFSA Preparation Workshops, and Guidance Counselor Workshop. The FAFSA Completion Workshops were not held due to lack of need and volunteer time constraints.

Major Outcomes & Successes:

Co-Opportunity, VITA FAFSA Completion Assistance: This initiative provided for volunteers at seven tax preparation sites to be trained to provide on-line FAFSA completion assistance to tax filers who also needed help filing a FAFSA. The VITA program provided free tax preparation services to low income tax filers. The sites assisted a total of 27 individuals who sought help in filling out their FAFSA. Of the 27 students helped, six were first-time FAFSA filers, 18 were renewal FAFSA filers and three were of an unknown status. Twenty-four filers were able to submit a completed FAFSA as a result of the assistance provided.

FAFSA Preparation Workshops: These workshops were held at two community colleges. The workshops provided information on how to complete a FAFSA and types of financial aid that are available as a result of filing the FAFSA. The workshops were attended by a total of 25 students and their family members from the inner-city high schools in Hartford and New Haven.

Guidance Counselor Workshop: This one day workshop provided high school guidance counselors the opportunity to attend sessions designed to inform them on various topics which relate to the financial barriers underrepresented students face when trying to attend college. The workshop was attended by 105 counselors and representatives from 21 colleges, universities and proprietary schools. Surveyed results from the guidance counselors who attend the sessions indicated a high of 51 percent having little knowledge of the session topics prior to attending the sessions. As a result of attending the sessions, all counselors indicated that they gained knowledge about the presented topic.

Challenges:

Co-Opportunity, VITA FAFSA Completion Assistance: As originally planned, the process would have been a fully on-line setup whereby the tax preparation software would have interfaced with the USDOE on-line FAFSA application. However, this turned out to be more than could be accomplished in the first year. It is hoped that this interface will be setup for year two. Also, the number of individuals assisted was lower than expected. New outreach approaches will be tried in year two in hopes of increasing the number of students and families who take advantage of the service.

FAFSA Preparation Workshops: Attendance at the preparation workshops was extremely low, despite early promotion of the event to the target high schools. One reason for the low turnout may be attributable to the fact that most high schools in the state hold their own financial aid nights. As such, students and parents are getting the information they need through those events.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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Executive Summary:

The office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) through its Higher Education Financial Services and Preparatory Programs (HEFS & P2) department has forged both internal and external partnerships within the District of Columbia (DC) to utilize resources more strategically and implement strategies and actions that would increase the number of students that are prepared to graduate high school and succeed in college. As a result of these partnerships, the OSSE has moved closer to providing services to District students and their parents in accomplishing three main goals: (1) increasing District students and families knowledge of how to prepare for, gain acceptance, and finance a college education; (2) providing District parents and students with a deeper understanding of college financing; and (3) increasing the number students who persist through critical college transitions. Specifically, in the first year of programming the College Access funds have provided the following activities:

- Provided on-site outreach at secondary and postsecondary institutions;
- Developed and initiated a financial awareness outreach strategy to address the obstacle of students applying late for college; and therefore, not maximizing the amount of financial assistance that could be obtained;
- Organized and executed a targeted one-day summit for students;
- Partnered with four colleges in the southeast to support undergraduate college students succeed; and
- Initiated the development of a one-stop information Web site specific to the needs of District Columbia students.

Highlights

In the fall semester of 2008, the Higher Education Financial Services and Preparatory Programs' (HEFS/P2) Retention Team visited the campuses of Saint Augustine's College, North Carolina Central University, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical University, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Virginia State University, Delaware State University, and Montgomery College. These schools were selected based on the number of DC TAG students (including DC Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs - GEAR UP- students) currently attending the university, specifically first-year students. During these visits, the retention team was able to discuss accomplishments and barriers to attending college for our DC students.

Students offered great insight into the college persistence of DC students, including the college selection and financial aid processes. The team also engaged in conversations with college

faculty and staff who provided their own thoughts and opinions on District students, including their academic contributions to classes and the university overall.

The HEFS/P2 Retention Team conducted a second round of visits in February of 2009. During this time period, the team visited North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College, Bennett College, Virginia State University, North Carolina Central University, Shaw University, and Saint Augustine's College. Since it was previously determined that financial aid is a major hurdle for students, the team presented opportunities on each campus to assist students with both their Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) and DC OneApp online applications. There was a huge response from our District students. On each campus, the team worked with students to complete their FAFSA and begin the DC OneApp process with a special emphasis on completing the process by turning in their supporting documents. Students were excited and engaged in the financial aid process, which allowed for the team to continue collecting data on college persistence. Survey data from each student gauged their greatest successes and struggles as current college students. At a preliminary glance, financial aid seems to be one of the greatest concerns for our students.

As a result of the retention efforts, the OSSE is better informed to shape the college awareness campaign to target rising juniors and seniors in the District of Columbia public and public charter school systems. This campaign will help to better inform students and their parents on how to navigate the college admissions and financial aid process.

DELAWARE

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Executive Summary:

The Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) has been moving firmly ahead with work associated with our College Access Challenge Grant (CACG). Projects currently in the works include an enhanced Communication Program related to the Web site dedicated to access and success in postsecondary education, the Collaborative Counselor Training Initiative, and the development of a Transfer of Credit Matrix.

Communication

DDOE has partnered with Janet Hughes and Associates, a public relations firm, to expand, enhance and update the state's college access "Yes You Can!" Web site, www.yesyoucande.com. The purpose of this expansion is to provide one place where students and families can access information needed for both access and success in postsecondary education. The Web site will be a portal for most, if not all, of the information developed by state, schools, higher education institutes and organizations serving students related to access and success in postsecondary education. The DDOE has been working on portal development and enhancements to the Web site and it is on schedule. The Web developer has provided a detailed work plan that is reviewed monthly to ensure all pieces are on scheduled.

Collaborative Counselor Initiative

The Collaborative Counselor Initiative is providing for the creation of training modules so that school counselors can work more effectively with low income families. This initiative is designed to increase the number of students attending college from these families. The Educational Development Council (EDC) has developed draft modules for the state. These draft modules are currently being reviewed for feedback. Our intent in Delaware is to use these training modules in several levels: (1) Graduate level courses which would be available through Wilmington University; (2) an online course which could be done self-paced to do parts or the whole program; and (3) used as individual units for technical assistance with individual schools/counselors.

EDC will provide on-site training starting in July for those individuals who will act as facilitators for the online portion. The training for the school counselors will begin in September 2009.

Transfer of Credit Matrix

A contractor has been secured for the Transfer of Credit Matrix and work is progressing as planned and scheduled. Databases have been reviewed and computer programming is currently underway to develop the system. We are communicating regularly with our partners (the Institutions of Higher Education) to review the work completed to date and to discuss a process for rolling out this initiative in order to best serve all students. It is anticipated that a meeting will be coordinated during the summer of 2009 to finalize details related to this initiative.

FLORIDA

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Executive Summary:

The purpose of the Florida College Access Challenge Grant (FLCACG) project is to help underrepresented students obtain a postsecondary education. Florida's project activities have been directly related to the three broad goals of getting students ready for college, into college, and through college. The FLCACG project outcomes, successes, and challenges are outlined below.

FLCACG outcomes, successes, and challenges:

Florida's CACG activities have reached out to inform students, parents, and guidance counselors about the courses and other requirements for college entrance. The mediums for training have included on-site training activities to make full use of career and academic information and planning tools available in order to encourage early preparation for college.

- A major success of the grant was the distribution of approximately 240,000 "Career Cruisers" publications to eighth grade students by Florida's Department of Education's (DOE) Division of Workforce Education. This "Career Cruiser" publication was provided to assist students with exploring the relationship between personal interests and career goals. This publication provides sample occupation descriptions, average earnings, and educational levels required by various careers.
- Another major success was the multitude of training opportunities to over 4,800 middle and high school guidance counselors by the Florida Center for Advising and Academic Support (FCAAS). This training assisted students to utilize various mediums via the DOE sponsored Web site FACTS.org.
- A third major success was the development of remedial high school courses provided by the Florida DOE's Division of Community Colleges. Materials for remediation were used in high school training events to provide students with academic preparation to get ready for college.

The FLCACG project also implemented the following successful activities:

- A major success was the Florida Project Get Set coordinated by the Florida DOE's Division of Community Colleges, which brought together

- high school, community college, and university faculty to identify how to better engage students in the college experience.
- Another major success was the multitude of activities that provided assistance to students in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
 - A third major success was the disbursement of the additional \$2,450,000 to offer grant aid to several thousand eligible need based students through Florida's Office of Student Financial Assistance. Postsecondary institutions were able to utilize these funds for eligible needy students.

To assist our college enrolled students toward successful completion of their postsecondary education, Florida used some of the CACG funds to augment student academic services via the Project Succeed implemented by the Florida DOE's Division of Community Colleges.

- This assistance provided over 43,000 beneficial tutoring sessions for students needing such services to succeed in school.

GEORGIA

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The University System of Georgia leads implementation of Georgia's College Access Plan on behalf of the Governor's Office and Alliance of Education Agency Heads. The target populations for the Plan are: (1) P-12 students who are underrepresented in postsecondary education and their families; and (2) low-income adults at risk of not completing college.

Goals of the Project

- 1) To increase the number of underrepresented students who graduate from Georgia high schools academically ready, informed about, supported for, and motivated for postsecondary education;
- 2) To increase the number of underrepresented students graduating from Georgia high schools who successfully transition into, persist in, and complete postsecondary education; and
- 3) To increase the college degree attainment of low-income adults who have some college credit but have not been enrolled in the past year and have not attained a degree.

Major Outcomes and Successes

Enhancements to GACollege411, the State's free portal for helping students plan, apply, and pay for college, were soft- launched in April 2009. A hard launch is scheduled for September 2009. Enhancements include motivational modules, increased information for middle school students and families and for adult students, enhanced career planning resources, and a redesigned interface.

A successful Georgia Apply to College Week was held at eight high schools on November 9-15, 2008, with extensive media coverage and a proclamation by the Governor:

- 870 students participated;
- 693 GACollege411 accounts were created in one week (vs. 1974 for entire previous year);
- 5,710 college admissions applications were submitted in one week (vs. 1,967 for entire previous year);
- Nearly 80 percent of the students agreed, in a follow-up survey, that the event influenced their decision to apply to college.

Plans are to expand Apply to College Week to fifty high schools in 2009.

Two hundred and seventy-six Early College students enrolled in 716 dual enrollment courses in Fall 2008. The completion rate was 82 percent, with 1,673 semester hours earned. The Early College Grant Program funds book costs for Early College students which are not covered through Georgia's ACCEL (dual enrollment) program.

A market research firm has been selected to conduct research on barriers and interests of adults with some college education but without a degree. Results will be used to shape a public awareness campaign.

Five University System of Georgia institutions have been selected to receive \$25,000 mini-grants for participation in the Adult Learning Consortium to modify/expand degree programs matched with workforce needs and strategic industries and to analyze and fill in gaps in services and programs as they relate to adults underserved in postsecondary education.

An outreach/awareness initiative, led by Communities in Schools, has made formal linkages with nine statewide organizations, all of which are assisting in getting the college-going message out to our target audience; Participating organizations include:

- Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education,
- Georgia PTA
- Latin American Association
- DHR After School Programs
- Georgia Family Connection Partnership
- United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta
- University System of Georgia
- Georgia Student Finance Commission
- Technical College System of Georgia

Messaging for initial outreach efforts, beginning in March 2009, was categorized as:

Blast – providing as much information as possible to as many people (parents, community leaders, agencies and organizations, students of all ages) through a broad range of resources, *Focused*--carrying out smaller group meetings and forums, and *Intense*—consisting of one-on-one conversations with students and families about the importance of and resources available for postsecondary education.

Results include:

- Electronic newsletters distributed to 900 local community affiliates;
- Information distributed to 36,108 parents/guardians/family members;
- Information distributed to 193,051 students;
- 190 presentations made to Chambers of Commerce and business groups; and
- One-on-one conversations with 36,315 students, grades 6-12.

Three hundred and seventy-four motivational modules have been downloaded since being developed and posted on GACollege411 in March 2009

(<http://www.gsfc.org/main/publishing/motivational%20resources/>).

This series of age-appropriate motivational modules with Spanish translations is designed to inspire and educate students and their families about the benefits and opportunities of postsecondary education. They are available free of charge for community groups, partner organizations, counselors, and the general public.

- A modularized college-level course for school counselors, financial aid administrators and college admission counselors is in the final stages of development. The course focuses on career counseling and academic and financial advising strategies for working with underrepresented and underserved students.

GUAM

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Executive Summary:

The Guam Community College-College Access Challenge Grant (GCC CACG) Program in its initial year of operation implemented activities and services in October of 2008. Guam Community College CACG program in collaboration with the Guam Public School System, and partner agencies have come together to assist in creating initial awareness of the CACG program and its benefit and services to the underrepresented and disadvantaged population in middle and high schools. The GCC CACG program has visited eight GPSS middle schools and five high schools, GPSS JPTorres Alternative School, GCC secondary programs, and non-profit organizations that promote services to high risk populations. The major outcome is that eight middle schools and four high schools, GCC secondary programs, and the GPSS alternative schools are now aware of the CACG program benefits and services for underserved populations within the Guam Public School System. Through presentations and orientations, parents and students are responding to the services and benefits of the CACG program. And, with the collaboration and help of agencies who serve low-income families, more families are aware of the CACG.

GCC CACG also produced flyers that were distributed to the Mayors' community centers, and partner agencies promoting the program. Media coverage involved articles in the Pacific Daily News education updates section and appearances on KUAM News Extra.

Some of the major outcomes of the GCC CACG are that the Guam Public School System and the Guam communities are aware of our program. As a result we have had tremendous responses from parents who want to enroll their child/children into our program, and students who are excited to be a part of the program. GCC CACG conducted an ongoing survey of parents and students and their thoughts about college. Our findings indicate that thirty one percent of students frequently communicate their career goals with their parents, and forty five percent sometimes communicate with their parents about their career goals. Ninety-three percent of students strongly agree or agree that a college education is important for them to achieve their goals, sixty-six percent of students do not have knowledge of college financial aid opportunities; and twelve percent strongly agree or agree that they can afford to pay for college.

Eighty-six percent of parents surveyed feel that they would plan for their child/children's college education if they are more familiar with financial aid opportunities, and seventy-six percent would attend a financial aid and college preparation and admissions workshops. Twenty-one percent of parents surveyed are below the \$25,000 income level, and fifty-eight percent are below the \$15,000 income level.

The GCC CACG program held orientations at the village community centers and Guam Community College to share with parents and students the benefits and services of the program. At least 400 parents and students attended the orientations. GCC CACG provided materials and Web site information on college preparation and financial aid for those who attended the orientations. Evaluations were conducted during the orientations; 100 percent of parents and students surveyed strongly agree or agree that the materials and brochures were valuable to them and the most important information was learning about the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), followed by information about CACG, and college preparation and other financial aid resources.

The challenges we encountered initially is the hiring of a guidance counselor and tutors. GCC CACG guidance counselors and tutors came on board in January of 2009. And, we hired a part-time program coordinator in April after obtaining approval from our U.S. Department of Education program manager.

Currently, we are offering tutoring services at the Guam Public School middle and high schools, and will continue tutoring services in the summer for GPSS summer school. We have Saturday tutoring sessions at Guam Community College, and we held a Student Leadership and Professional Development event for our participants in April, which was well attended. All middle and high schools were represented at the Student Leadership and Professional Development event. We do have upcoming events throughout May, June, July, and August. We will be having our Summer Academic Program from June 22, 2009 to July 14, 2009. Middle and high school students will take refresher courses in math, English, science, languages, and computers. We will also integrate career goals components during the Summer Academy. College entrance exam preparation in math and English will be conducted in June for our participants who will be taking entrance exams in July. English as a second language is being offered this summer for students who are struggling in learning the basics of the English language. Field trips are scheduled for this summer to public and private industries to create awareness with our participants on the variety of careers available in both sectors. Another Student Leadership and Professional Development Day will be held in July; participants will learn more about teamwork, communication, goal setting, leadership, time management, financial planning, and hear from guest speakers who are from both the public and private sector to share about careers and leadership.

Overall GCC CACG in its first year of implementation has created awareness of the program to its partner agencies, parents and students, and the communities. Services and activities are being implemented. Our ultimate goal is to create a college going culture amongst the schools, and particularly parents and students, through the information, materials, services and benefits CACG will contribute to its participants and partner agencies.

HAWAII

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Executive Summary:

The State of Hawaii's initial project proposal was to subgrant the CACG to non-profit organizations via a request for proposal (RFP) process. During the lengthy RFP process, a favorable opportunity transpired with the Hawaii P-20 Partnership (Hawaii P-20) in joint effort with the Hawaii Department of Education (DOE), and the University of Hawaii (UH) to develop a college access portal to improve student opportunities to enter into college. To initiate this proposed change, Elizabeth Corbin sent an email request to Karmon Simms-Coates on March 30, 2009. On April 16, 2009, Ms. Simms-Coates requested modified Goals & Objectives, and Budget/Budget Narrative forms to reflect the proposed change. The modified forms were sent to Ms. Simms-Coates on April 24, 2009 by Kathy Yim. On May 7, 2009, a conference call between Ms. Simms-Coates, Ms. Corbin, and Ms. Yim took place. During the call, Ms. Simms-Coates requested that the goals and objectives be revised to illustrate how they will be measurable and outcome-based. The revised goals and objectives were submitted to Ms. Simms-Coates via e-mail on May 20, 2009.

The proposal change was approved by the U.S. Department of Education, the State of Hawaii Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism (DBEDT) and the process has begun to enter into a contract with Hawaii P-20. Hawaii P-20 will develop a "college access portal" to provide comprehensive, personalized information for students and parents about college and career planning. The system is envisioned to incorporate the DOE's Personal Transition Plan required for high school graduation, "degree audits" to examine students' high school records relative to requirements for high school graduation as well as college and career in their fields of interest, college applications for postsecondary institutions, and secured electronic transfer of high school transcript information for admissions and financial aid awards.

Hawaii P-20 will work with the DOE and UH college counselors, information technology specialists, and personal transition plan coordinators to develop and implement a Student Web portal that will provide early college preparation and access information to Hawaii's students throughout their secondary education. Planned features of the Student Web portal include: (1) degree audit; (2) college and career planning; (3) college application tools; and (4) financing resource center.

Hawaii P-20 will target marketing efforts to underrepresented populations by means of the UH campuses. These regions include but are not limited to the Leeward Community College on Oahu and Hawaii Community College of Hawaii Island. Hawaii P-20 will also work directly with DOE schools; in particular, Title 1 schools where 40 percent or more of their students qualify for free/reduced lunch status, to incorporate the Student Web portal into the Personal Training Plans of the students.

IOWA

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Executive Summary:

With support from the College Access Challenge Grant, the Iowa College Student Aid Commission is addressing needs in the following four areas:

1. Development of a Financial Aid Web Portal
2. Public Awareness Campaign
3. Financial Literacy Training
4. Career Information and Decision-Making Support to Students

Financial Aid Web Portal

The commission is coordinating a multi-agency project to develop a Web-based system of public awareness, information, and services in support of college access and affordability. The planned system, also called a Web portal, will integrate and provide enhanced public access to a wide range of technology and information resources, many maintained by external state agencies and other entities. Partners include the Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Department of Administrative Services – Integrated Technology Enterprise, Iowa Department of Administrative Services – Procurement Division, Iowa Workforce Development, and others.

The Web portal project addresses a number of state educational and workforce policy objectives by providing resources for current and prospective students, parents, educators, and others. System tools in development will support:

- High school and postsecondary curriculum planning
- Career information access and planning
- Iowa Work Force Job Search
- National, state, and local scholarship search and applications
- Student loan information
- Access to Iowa high school electronic transcripts
- College admission applications
- Direct consultation with agency professionals
- Connections to other state agency resources
- Access to Iowa's State Enterprise e-Payment procedures for on-line bill-payment

Development of the Web portal is envisioned as a multi-stage project. Major outcomes to date include:

- software and systems design; e.g., use-case development; development of functional requirements, including technical documentation, of database and Web systems;
- implementation of a new user interface into existing scholarship and grant software applications;
- implementation of single sign-on, authorization, and authentication process into scholarship and grant applications which allows users to access multiple sections of the Web Portal with a single ID and password;
- design of a web service proxy to serve as a hub among the career information system, enhanced scholarship and grant applications, agency data warehouse, and applications of partner state agencies.
- consolidation of multiple databases into a single data repository;
- design of a new financial aid application wizard that will allow users to apply for state aid programs via the web;
- technical, legal, and procedural preparation for a request for proposals (RFP) to procure vendor services associated with development of the web portal. The Commission issued the RFP on March 11, 2009. On April 27, the Commission's board of directors authorized staff to enter into negotiations with the winning bidder. (The RFP remains posted at http://bidopportunities.iowa.gov/index.php?pgname=viewrfp&rfp_id=3166.)

Public Awareness Campaign

The grantee commissioned the production of a television commercial to publicize free resources related to planning, preparing, and paying for college. The commercial aired regularly during peak viewing hours in the state's major broadcast markets—including Des Moines, Council Bluffs, Cedar Rapids, Waterloo, Dubuque, Mason City, Ottumwa, Davenport, and Sioux City—from January 26 through March 26, 2009. The commercial is posted on the Commission's Web site at <http://www.iowacollegeaid.gov/commissioncentral/spotlight.php?a=73>. In addition, the agency's Director of Public Relations, Communications and Outreach, appeared on numerous TV and radio broadcasts throughout the state to promote financial aid awareness.

Financial Literacy Training Modules

The Commission has purchased a financial literacy program that includes 15 training modules and on-line coursework on various financial literacy topics. In addition, Iowa College Student Aid Commission staff will receive training by the vendor to effectively provide direct instruction to students, financial aid administrators, and college access providers within the state. The financial literacy program focuses on personal money management, student loan repayment, budgeting, credit card debt and other personal finance-related topics.

Career Information and Decision-Making System

Iowa law requires the state's school districts to assist 8th graders in creating personal plans that guide each student through completing the high school core curriculum and prepares them for postsecondary success. To address this state policy objective, the Commission uses a share of

CACG grant funds to provide access to Choices, a proprietary web-based curriculum planning, career information, and decision-making system. A single agreement licenses access for all Iowa middle schools, high schools, area education agencies, and community colleges.

IDAHO

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Executive Summary:

The Office of the Idaho State Board of Education has implemented the following activities to date: FAFSA Completion Event, AP Counselor Training (to take place in July 2009), Dual Credit Scholarships, and Information Campaign.

FAFSA Completion Event: With the assistance of financial aid directors from Idaho's public four-year institution as well as various other public and private institutions around the state, we began planning for a statewide Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Completion Event in October 2008. Idaho has identified six educational regions and we planned and budgeted for two events per region. The purpose of the event was to give one-on-one assistance to students as they completed their FAFSA online. Our goal ensures that at least 50 percent of event attendees completed their FAFSA on-site. The event was held February 21, 2009, which was before Idaho's March 1, 2009, FAFSA priority deadline, but after several institutions' FAFSA priority deadlines, which was a challenge. However, it did not dissuade those students who had yet to complete their FAFSA from attending the event. Each site provided refreshments, door prizes, and a computer lab for students to complete their FAFSA. Most students received a door prize just by attending the event. Our FAFSA completion rate was 86 percent, well above the goal set in our original CACG application. Overall, we considered this activity to be very successful; however, due to site staffing issues, we were only able to host nine events rather than 12. Additionally, the financial aid professionals taking part in the event all agreed that hosting the event a few weeks earlier would have been more beneficial to the students. We plan to adjust our program for the second year of the grant to hold this event earlier in the year and possibly hold more than one event.

Advanced Placement Counselor Training: Advanced Placement (AP) counselors are applying to attend The College Board's Summer Institute July 20-23, 2009, in Los Angeles, California. Those counselors applying are from each of our six educational regions and have agreed to provide training to other AP counselors upon their completion of the Summer Institute. The Idaho School Counselor's Association (ISCA) has also provided a breakout session at its annual conference for AP counselors who attend the Summer Institute to present workshop(s). The College Board's AP Counselor Summer Institute will provide training within the context of a case study. Experts in various areas (i.e., financial aid, general admission, essay writing, communications, etc.) will present college-going skills training to the counselors. They will also be trained in utilizing online resources, using data to become a leader, understanding the support needs of students with disabilities, counseling in the 21st century, and more. Trained AP counselors will use knowledge gained from the Summer Institute and subsequent training sessions to increase AP test enrollment and AP options for underrepresented students.

Dual Credit Scholarships: Providing Dual Credit scholarships has been one of our most successful activities this year. We awarded 202 scholarships to underrepresented high school students. These scholarships covered one class per student up to four credit hours. We also provided textbook support to students; however, textbook support was not requested on most students' applications. We intend to increase the amount of Dual Credit scholarships provided to high school in next year's budget as well as provide more textbook support.

Information Campaign: In October 2008, we launched our Web portal, which we tagged U Go! Idaho. The portal is designed to provide high school students and their parents with links to websites specifically designed to assist students preparing for college. Currently, the site has links to KnowHow2Go, Idaho Scholarship information and applications, College.gov, FAFSA, and our institutions' Dual Credit Brochure. Our biggest challenge has been creating an interactive site that is engaging to students and parents. Our goal was to draw 20,000 hits. Currently, we do not have the finished product in place, which has limited the amount of hits. We plan to contract with an outside firm in this second year to create a more exciting and interactive portal in the next year. With the contractor's help, we also want to make a site that is easy to find and access via search engines.

Our statewide social media campaign based on the materials developed by the KnowHow2Go campaign began in November 2008. Board staff distributed KnowHow2Go's PSA regarding academic rigor statewide via television stations and our website. Additionally, we have made this PSA available for high schools to download and use in their morning news productions. In the coming year we will be utilizing grant funds to further the Idaho State Board of Education's objective of increasing the awareness of the necessity to prepare earlier for postsecondary education among Idaho students and parents by encouraging increased rigor in core subjects. We will accomplish this in establishing a fan page on Facebook and "tweets" on Twitter, as well as a channel on YouTube.

Information distribution will involve a statewide public awareness campaign. This effort through more traditional avenues will help augment our other efforts as outlined above. This will include a statewide media launch of our upgraded website including reporter stories on television and in the newspaper and radio interviews. A broad, multiplatform approach to message distribution coupled with a dynamic, interactive website is imperative to the success of Idaho's College Access Challenge Grant. Support from the Chief Communications Officer of the Idaho State Board of Education will help the staff of CACG gain access to traditional and non-traditional social media outlets, thus enabling thousands of Idahoans to learn the importance of increased rigor in core subject areas and the long term benefits.

ILLINOIS

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Executive Summary:

The College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) project being administered by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission – All Access Illinois – is a college access initiative built on the foundation of near-peer mentoring. The goal of All Access Illinois is to raise the college-going and completion rate of underrepresented groups in Illinois. The strategy for achieving that goal is through the development of a corps of 78 near-peer mentors, called the ISACorps, who will be deployed across the state in each of the 39 community college districts. Two Corps members will be placed in each of the 39 districts.

The project has not deviated from the tight implementation schedule established in August 2008 (at the time of funding). The major focus during the 2008-09 academic year was the recruitment of qualified applicants and creating program infrastructure. Our near-peer mentors are being recruited from the college graduating class of 2009. We began promoting All Access Illinois and the ISACorps this fall to both potential applicants and to potential partners. We filled the first of our three (non-grant funded) CACG Coordinator positions and had that individual take the lead for recruitment. Brochures were developed and positions advertised on college campuses, college career center Web sites, non-profit and service oriented bulletin boards, listservs and job banks, at college and career fairs, within professional organizations, and in targeted strategic outreach to ensure a robust and diverse applicant pool. This required a great deal of travel and manpower and resulted in more than 700 applicants for the 78 positions.

Resume review, application development, application review, scheduling of in-person interviews, interview process development, and hiring process development were carried out during late winter and into the early spring. Interviews were scheduled for 330 applicants and have been ongoing during March, April, and May. The job offer, acceptance, and location assignment process is in process and should be completed by May 22nd. The Corps members have an official start date of June 16, 2009.

Simultaneous to the recruitment effort was the equally complex task of building a cost efficient and effective hiring system that allowed the flexibility demanded by a near-peer mentoring program, while complying with all state employment, civil service, and procurement laws. Extensive research and collaboration with other state agencies was needed to create and gain approval for a new employee classification.

Also taking place this spring was the development of an intense seven week training program for the Corps members. In addition to developing the content and securing an impressive guest faculty from around the country, securing a facility for the training was a crucial aspect to the success of the program. Because the candidates were recruited from throughout the state to be

placed in locations throughout the state, gathering all Corps members and housing them for an extended period of time in one location was a logistical challenge. The inherent challenge was made more difficult due to our tight budget constraints. After much leg work, we were able to secure dorm and instruction space at a local college from June 23rd through August 7th.

The major focus for the summer will be the training program. As near-peer mentors, our Corps will face fewer obstacles in dealing with high school students and greater obstacles in working with experienced professionals. To mitigate concerns on the part of high school counselors and other professionals in the high schools, we have crafted – with involvement from the guidance community – a very intense full-time mandatory residential seven-week training program this summer, supplemented with field experience, ongoing regional training, mentorship, and professional development. The curriculum includes eight core courses: financial barriers to higher education; academic barriers to higher education; social barriers to higher education; public speaking and professional skill development; college access marketing; counseling and mentoring skills; community outreach; and college and career planning. In addition, practicum and seminar sessions are designed to offer hands-on guided field experience and instruction from practitioners in the social services. The execution of a training program of this magnitude will require the vast majority of our professional staff to devote 80 percent or more of their time to the CACG project this summer. In addition, the second of our three (non-grant funded) CACG Coordinators was hired and will begin on May 18th, and the third and final CACG coordinator is in the process of being hired and will begin on May 23rd.

The Corps members will be deployed to their communities and will officially end their training period and begin outreach work on September 8th. Diffusion will be our major focus during this period. We have worked very closely with our colleagues in the education community to secure donated office space for the Corps members at high schools and colleges in each of the 39 regions. One of the three CACG Coordinators will focus entirely on building and maintaining collaborative relationships and partnerships along the P16 continuum, with the goal of supporting, promoting, and developing the Corps and its mission and goals. The success of this program depends on statewide buy-in and collaborative effort. To this end, we have already had tremendous success, not only in the ability to secure donated office space and below cost training facilities and dorm space, but in the tremendous response from the non-profit social service sector, the professional school counseling organizations, the community colleges, the financial aid community, and various public and private universities.

The two remaining CACG Coordinators will handle day-to-day supervision of the Corps. The CACG Coordinators will oversee the outreach strategies and activities of the Corps in each community. They will be responsible for community-level goal setting, Corps member evaluation, and will collect and contribute qualitative and quantitative data relevant to program evaluation.

The greatest success (and challenge) of the program so far has been the ability to adhere to an extremely ambitious timeline and budget for an extremely ambitious project. Hiring 78 extremely well-qualified individuals, providing benefits, providing seven weeks of free residential training, securing two years of office space and equipment, as well as developing training materials and tools to be used in the field – all for \$2.4 million dollars – with no CACG funds being used for administration and/or overhead is the accomplishment of a lifetime.

The most recent challenge we have faced is due to the unexpected and very public announcement this week that the CACG Program would be cancelled because research had found it to be ineffective. With no prior notice that the program would be cancelled or that an announcement would be made in the media, we were flooded with inquiries from Corps applicants, new hires, partners, collaborating schools, and others – just at the time when we were finalizing our Corps member placement and planning the high profile statewide announcement and launch of the Corps. Our hiring materials, particularly our employment contracts, had to be revised to include more specific funding contingency language, and a number of first choice candidates for the Corps decided to decline their offers. Nonetheless, we are continuing as planned and will aggressively pursue other sources of funding for this groundbreaking college access program to continue as planned into year two.

INDIANA

Indiana Commission for Higher Education
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Executive Summary:

The state of Indiana is currently using the College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) to support efforts and outreach to motivate students to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to postsecondary programs. By promoting academic and financial preparedness, raising awareness of college access events and opportunities, leveraging resources, and implementing activities, grant funds help local communities strive to reach the goal of influencing more students to take the steps necessary to enroll, persist and succeed in higher education.

Indiana's College Success Coalition was created as an effort to strengthen the capacity of communities working collaboratively to solve statewide challenges regarding college access and success of students in local communities. From August 2008 through May 2009, Indiana's College Success Coalition recruited and retained over 600 volunteers working within 16 local coalitions to provide financial, academic, and social services to Hoosier students, with a particular focus on reaching low-income and underrepresented students. Over 25 local coalition meetings and college access events were held in areas representing all 92 counties in Indiana, reaching students in both rural and urban communities. Of those meetings and events, over 110 new volunteers/ coalition members joined local efforts to reach the goal of increasing local community involvement in improving college access and success and strengthen local support systems for underrepresented students.

Program activities and components planned for this reporting period were shared at the first set of Coalition meetings held in November and December 2008. Agendas, meeting materials and coalition-building exercises were distributed to local coalitions. To reach the goals of increasing students' and families' awareness and knowledge of the steps necessary to get to and through college and the knowledge of postsecondary education financial options and opportunities, local Coalitions implemented the following CACG activities:

- Identified local leaders as Champions and Chairpersons.
- Promote 'Cash for College' events (i.e., College Goal Sunday and FAFSA Friday) via the "KnowHow2GoEvents" kits which were widely distributed in local areas. Event training was also provided.
- Supported efforts to raise awareness and increase enrollment for the Twenty-first Century Scholars program, which specifically targets low-income and underrepresented students
- Utilized and shared resources provided by Learn More Indiana (i.e., publications, presentations, website and e-communications).
- Utilized online tutorial/podcast on the steps to completing the FAFSA.
- Quarterly meetings of local membership with generally 20–30 individuals attending.

KANSAS

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Executive Summary:

The project plan for the state of Kansas has been threefold. It has encompassed the areas of training, education and early awareness. These were the three areas that we wanted to broaden opportunities for students, parents, guidance counselors, financial aid administrators, and other interested parties to be exposed to information and education about postsecondary educational and financial aid possibilities.

Within the training aspect of the project, the CACG grant was used to supplement the Kansas Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (KASFAA) sponsored High School Counselor Training Workshops in October 2008. These are half-day educational sessions held in the state to provide information about higher educational access and affordability – specifically financial aid opportunities – that are available to our Kansas students. In the past, three training teams provided these workshops in seven locations throughout Kansas. Prior to Fall 2008, the highest level of participation on record was 212 attendees during Fall 2007. With the additional funding available from the CACG grant, the seven locations were expanded to twelve locations throughout the state, focusing the new locations in rural and low-income areas, which are typically underfunded school districts. The workshops were also expanded to include middle school counselors and TRIO program colleagues. In addition, the CACG funding was used to waive the previously charged \$25.00 per person registration fee which helped cover site fees and refreshments. The additional outreach to our partners in education who work with younger students and/or underrepresented students resulted in an increase in counselor participation of 56 percent, up from 212 in Fall 2007 to 330 participants in Fall 2008. This well exceeded our goal of increasing participation by 10-25 percent.

The counselor training workshops were highly successful, judging by the evaluations from 267 of the workshop attendees. Counselors were especially grateful for the expansion of the number of sites available and the waiver of the workshop fee. The TRIO program colleagues were very appreciative to have been included in the workshops and it was a good opportunity for them to network with secondary school counselors and student financial aid administrators

As for the educational aspect of the project, the CACG grant was used to supplement the funding of the College Goal Sunday project in February 2009. In February of 2008, 198 student financial aid experts volunteered their time at nineteen sites in the state to provide information about student financial aid and assistance in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Although our initial plan was to expand the number of sites, it was somewhat difficult to do as these are reserved almost a year prior to the date. We were able to add one additional site – an urban low income area. Our goal was to increase the number of participants in the

event by 15-25 percent. We were very pleased to be able to increase the attendance 30 percent, from 838 students in 2008 to 1,091 in 2009. This was a 52 percent increase from 2007 when student attendance was at 716.

The third component of our project for the CACG grant is yet to transpire. The grant will be used during the Summer 2009 to expand the current TRIO Talent Search summer programs at six sites (two programs at one site) in the state. The sites represent three public four year universities and two community colleges. Geographically they are located in eastern, central, and western Kansas. These programs provide educational awareness about postsecondary educational opportunities, financial aid information and career exploration to students from low income and disadvantaged backgrounds. At present approximately 200 students are able to participate in these summer programs at their current funding level. Our goal, with the CACG grant, is to expand participation in these programs by 25-30 percent. The status of this project at present is that each TRIO program was asked to provide a project proposal and estimated request for funding by February 20, 2009. The TRIO programs were notified of the acceptance, and provided the amount of funding for their projects, on March 16, 2009. The funding for each program was sent out to the campuses on April 10, 2009. The programs will be implemented during June and July 2009. Each program will be required to submit a performance report to the Kansas Board of Regents by August 14, 2009.

KENTUCKY

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Executive Summary:

All activities and components outlined in the grant application were implemented during the reporting period.

Regional Outreach

Nine service areas have been identified within the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Throughout each area, outreach counselors promoted higher education opportunities by disseminating Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA) information, materials, media packets, and publications; participating in career fairs, college nights, financial aid and financial literacy workshops and other related events; participating in radio, television and newspaper interviews; and making personal, on-site visits to those able to assist KHEAA in providing information about higher education opportunities. Community contacts in each area included, but were not limited to: community-based agencies, Cooperative Extension (4-H) offices, Family Resource/Youth Services Centers, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) programs, health departments/hospitals, libraries, media outlets (newspapers, radio/TV stations), professional organizations, social service programs and TRIO programs.

Financial Aid Tips of the Month

Newspaper articles and pre-produced radio public service announcements were prepared by our Publications team and distributed to media outlets in each territory. Articles/PSAs were time-sensitive, designed to make students and families aware of when, during the financial aid and admissions cycle, they should be performing certain tasks.

Career Exploration and College Planning Website

GoHigherKY.org, a one-stop website to supply information to students and families to help them plan, prepare and pay for higher education was provided. The site was used by students in grades 8-12, parents, college students, adult students, school counselors and others. Users conducted interest inventories, explored careers, ran free scholarship searches, transferred information to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), found colleges that matched their preferences, applied to colleges online and sent their transcripts electronically.

College Info Road Show

Visiting middle schools, high schools, adult education centers, public libraries and other sites, these mobile classrooms provided a host of critical services directly to students and families in their own communities. Equipped with satellite Internet access, laptop computers, a projection unit and screen, and an instructor's podium, the Road Shows used state-of-the-art technology to connect students with the information they needed to research, pursue and succeed in their educational future beyond high school.

Age-Appropriate Publications

A variety of publications provided an introduction to making good grades, careers, high school graduation requirements, extracurricular activities and clubs, and the Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship (KEES) program; information on preparing for college, bonus high school courses, test dates, test-taking tips, and an introduction to student financial aid; information on virtual learning options, admissions information, how to compare schools, and a college planning timeline; an introduction to major financial aid programs, tips on how to get student aid, financial aid questions and answers, tax information, websites, and how to complete the FAFSA; and information about colleges, technical schools, trade schools, majors, costs, how to get enrolled, and financial aid opportunities.

Additional publications featured information on why both traditional and adult students should go to college (including a list of top Kentucky occupations by salary); glossary of financial aid terms, overview of the GoHigherKY.org website; a reality exercise in which students made lifestyle choices and tallied their monthly expenses in light of their projected income; freshman, sophomore, junior and senior year checklists; KEES data; and details about student financial aid programs.

Newsletters

Targeted newsletters were sent periodically throughout the academic year to middle and high school *counselors*, adult education providers, TRIO and GEAR UP personnel, social service offices and others. Time-sensitive newsletters were sent to *parents* of students included in our KEES database. (This listing encompasses students from every certified high school in the Commonwealth.) Using the KEES database, additional newsletters were sent to *recent high school graduates*. This publication provided support to those enrolled in postsecondary education and reminded those who had not yet enrolled that they could, and should, do so.

Additional Project Highlights:

State GEAR UP Grant

KHEEA continued its strong partnership with the state GEAR UP grantee, the Council on Postsecondary Education. Management staff members are regular participants in GEAR UP Kentucky's Committee of Partners and joined in frequent meetings with other GEAR UP stakeholders from around the state. KHEEA provided substantial match monies for the state grant and provided priority use of our outreach staff, mobile classrooms, publications and more for use at GEAR UP events. Staff is working together to craft scholarship award criteria and has provided \$1.5 million in scholarship funds. In addition, KHEEA's Publications Team helps

produce *The GEAR UP Gazette*, a newspaper insert provided through the Newspapers in Education initiative.

Partnership GEAR UP Grants

Outreach staff worked closely with the following partnership grants, providing outreach staff, mobile classrooms, publications and website instruction:

- Berea College GEAR UP
- Clinton County Board of Education
- Green River Regional Educational Co-op
- West Kentucky Education Co-op

Kentucky State Fair

The College Info Road Show exhibited at the 2008 Kentucky State Fair in Louisville. Fifty-one agency volunteers worked the 11-day event and shared career/college planning and student financial aid information via the distribution of more than 20,000 brochures, fliers, publications, applications and other items.

Kentucky Child Now! Great Kids Summits

Outreach staff provided in-kind sponsorship and support to the *2009 Regional Great Kids Summits: Do You Believe in Me? Do I Believe in Myself?* The summits, an initiative of Kentucky Child Now!, were a statewide effort to bring caring adults and special youth together to learn how to reach common goals in the areas of: *Ready for School, Ready for Work, and Ready for Life!*

During the *Ready for School* session, our outreach counselors helped participants learn how to make a plan for their educational future. Students played an interactive game of *The KHEAA College Challenge* and learned about how our many programs and services can make higher education affordable and accessible.

The gender-specific *Ready for Work* module helped students learn the skills necessary to get their first job and to begin building their career path. Social and interviewing skills, first impressions, attitudes, professional dress and other topics were discussed.

Problem-solving is a necessary part of success in life. Students in the *Ready for Life* session were asked to brainstorm answers for the question “How do we address student dropout rates in Kentucky and inspire young people to go to college?”

The regional conferences, held at six locations across Kentucky in February and March 2009, gave over 1,310 youth a chance to learn how to be successful in many aspects of their lives

“Our partnerships with GEAR UP Kentucky, KHEAA, KnowHow2GoKY.org, the Kentucky Child Now Youth Advisory Council, and business leaders have made these summits incredibly successful. It's been a way to show how partners can work together to reach a common goal,” said Mary Kate Poling, Executive Director of Kentucky Child Now!.

KHEAA-Specific Lesson Plans Developed with Highly Skilled Educator

Outreach staff created detailed lesson plans for Kentucky teachers and counselors showing the correlation between the content of our presentations and publications and the Kentucky State Assessment. Doing so helped teachers and school administrators see how our materials fit within the scope of their instruction and provided them with justification for having our staff in their classrooms during valuable “instructional time.”

Staff worked with one of Kentucky’s Highly Skilled Educators to craft lesson plans using KHEAA’s GoHigherKY.org website and our *Getting In* publication for high school seniors. *The Combined Curriculum Document* for both the eighth and twelfth grades was used as the foundation of the completed work. Adherence to this document ensured that our activities were aligned with those required by the Kentucky Department of Education for middle and high school students.

LOUISIANA

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Executive Summary:

Like many states in the country, Louisiana is facing vast budget cuts. The Executive Budget currently calls for higher education to absorb a \$219 million budget reduction in addition to a \$55 million budget cut imposed earlier this year by Governor Jindal due to a revenue shortfall. These cuts may extend further to \$440 million shortfall by 2012. In addressing budget reductions in the short-term, guiding principals have been established to protect the long-term priorities of the state, which includes increasing the number of graduates. The guidelines are:

- Protect core operations and functions that connect directly to student educational needs and workforce development
- Maintain academic access for students to the maximum extent possible
- Ensure that requirements for degree completion of prospective graduates are available when academic programs are constrained or eliminated
- Sustain a high level of excellent research focuses that reflect institutional priorities and further the State's economic development.

In addition, a new performance-based funding formula for higher education will be implemented that is designed to reward campuses for increasing the number of degrees and certificates awarded.

Even with these budgetary challenges, the Board of Regents remains focused in following the purpose, scope and goals set forth in our College Access Challenge Grant proposal.

As we work to increase underrepresented students' and their families' knowledge of postsecondary education benefits and opportunities, planning and preparing for college and career, financial planning and availability of and procedures for federal and state student financial aid programs the following has been done:

LOSFA

A sub-grant in the amount of \$49,500 was awarded to the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA), to fund *College Knowledge Events* at middle schools around the state. Provision of age-appropriate information to middle school students, grades 6th through 8th, and their parents about the importance of starting early to plan academically and financially for postsecondary education is the focus of these events. To date, LOSFA has conducted 27 workshops and reached over 1,000 students and parents.

During these events, LOSFA staff focuses on interactive resources designed to help students and parents learn more about the Benefits of Higher Education, College Expenses at Louisiana schools, and Saving/Paying for College through state, federal and other sources of aid. Without this information financial resources and years of academic preparation could be wasted as

students and parents find they failed to prepare in a timely manner to secure financial aid from state, federal and other sources.

LOSFA staff collaborated with a professional web design firm to develop the new interactive College Knowledge Web site www.osfa.la.gov/collegeknowledge (site features Appendix A).

LOSFA staff also partnered with LA Gear Up to offer College Knowledge workshops at GEAR UP schools. In addition LOSFA partnered with the Louisiana Council of Student Body Presidents (COSBP) and the LOSFA Trailblazers to feature profiles of successful college and high school students providing testimonials of the benefits of attending and planning for college. To date, the sub-grant has invoiced for \$26,559.49. The remaining funds will be used during the summer to cover costs associated with GEAR UP and TRIO Summer Camp Presentations, LA Scholars Initiative and LOSFA Trailblazer Summer Workshops, attendance at National College Access Network (NCAN) conference, Middle and High School Guidance Counselor Workshop, and providing College Financial Aid Director Workshops on Access Efforts.

ePortal and Promotional Media

A service agreement in the amount of \$150,000 to provide programming and related activities for Louisiana ePortal enhancements has been drafted and will be executed July 1, 2009 (pending ePortal funding). (Appendix B) The Board of Regents has been working with Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) and the GO Alliance to provide effective marketing regarding “access.” Through CACG funding the Board of Regents is interested in contracting with Lumina/KnowHow2Go (or similar entity) provide PSAs, Radio spots, posters and develop a customized Web site, <http://www.knowhow2go.org>. In addition, \$20,000 has been allocated to provide information in LA NEXT student magazine and Web site.

TRIO---Education Talent Search (ETS) Programs for outreach activities

Upon recommendation of the Louisiana Student Assistance Program (LaSAP), a state organization of the TRIO programs, 15 grants/contracts in the amount of \$15,000 each, were made available (one for each Education Talent Search programs in Louisiana). After meeting with each ETS program to discuss the activities and requirements for funding eligibility, interested ETS programs were encouraged to submit a standard proposal that included what services would be delivered. Although several programs were eager to expand delivery, many of the programs expressed concerns regarding “increasing” their student load because of recruitment challenges (primarily in hurricane impacted areas—inconsistent student enrollment in and around the New Orleans areas). Therefore, several ETS programs have opted to not participate, even after expanding the allowable deliverables to include educational “grass-roots style” workshops that may include a recruitment component. Contracts will be issued during May and work within each program will begin to provide summer outreach.

Summer Camps and EXPLORER Conferences

In collaboration with Louisiana GEARUP, a statewide EXPLORER conference was hosted providing services to 476 participants at the three day conference (Hosted at Louisiana Tech). Through CACG funds \$25,000 was allocated to host the conference that included **316 students, 120 teachers and administrators, and 40 parents**. Most of the parents attended the Preparing Parents for Possibilities (P3) workshop on Friday and heard presentations from university admissions, financial aid representatives, and others in an effort to provide as much information

about college access as possible. Students attending the conference become “college access” information providers at their schools through EXPLORER Clubs.

Students have been submitting applications to attend the Summer Learning Camps. (As of May 11, 2009, 867 eligible student applications have been processed.) Through CACG funding (\$500,000) approximately 580 student/campers will be assigned to one of the camps offered at Nicholls. In addition, one session will be offered at Grambling State University along with two sessions at Louisiana Tech. It is expected that confirmation letters will be mailed to campers selected for participation by May 15, 2009. Camps begin May 31.

MASSACHUSETTS

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Executive Summary:

The development of the Massachusetts College and Career Portal has been a goal of Massachusetts for the last four years. The team developing the Portal includes the Executive Office of Education, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Department of Higher Education, and the Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority (MEFA). MEFA has been designated by Governor Patrick to manage the development of the portal as well as the day-to-day operation, marketing and training of school staff. The following are grant-related outcomes during this reporting period.

- MEFA named a project manager to coordinate all aspects of the Portal's development – **summer 2008**.
- Technical specifications were developed for the Portal – **fall 2008**.
- MEFA began developing the Request for Proposal (RFP) for the Massachusetts College and Career Web portal as well as continuing to meet with key stakeholders. In **November, 2008**, MEFA released the RFP to the public.
- The Selection Committee, which consisted of representatives of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), the Department of Higher Education (DHE) and Executive Office of Education and MEFA, reviewed six proposals in **January-February 2009** and invited the three finalists to make a presentation to the Selection Committee and answer follow-up questions.
- On **April 29**, MEFA signed a contract with ConnectEDU with Phase I work to commence in **summer 2009** with the development of the following modules:
 - Evaluating interest, skills, career and students' postsecondary options
 - Online matching tools for students
 - Electronic document exchange infrastructure
- Phase II will commence in fall 2009 followed by third and final phase of the Portal in winter 2009-2010. The portal will be fully operational and pilot testing by spring 2010.

A draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was developed outlining the Portal governance structure and roles and responsibilities of each party in the leadership team – **winter 2009**. The Massachusetts College and Career Web Portal will have an oversight committee comprised of the Secretary of Education, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Commissioner of Higher Education and Executive Director of MEFA. The MOU will be finalized and signed by each party later this year.

MAINE

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Executive Summary:

The Maine College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) project added two new positions, resulting in an immediate expansion of outreach efforts. Each Outreach Representative is responsible for a certain area of the state and maintains an office in that area. Having these positions has allowed us to begin the creation of a K – 16+ Financial Literacy Program. The purpose of the program is to offer college, career, financial aid and responsible borrowing programs to students (or their parents) of any age. While we use the CACG funds to focus on middle school, high school and adult students returning to college, we intend to create a full array of programs for Maine residents.

We believe that reaching students before their senior year in high school is critical. Students must learn about preparing for college, saving for college and the financial aid process in middle school and during the early high school years. We already work with many middle school students using a program we developed entitled “Get A Life.” The program helps students understand the connection between college and career. We are now working to expand that program to be effective for freshman and sophomores in high school, so they can continue preparing for college.

In addition to our one day in-person financial aid training event, we now also offer a Webinar training program. On the second Wednesday of each month, we provide a one-hour training program on various topics related to financial aid. For example, in January we offered an overview of the FAFSA. The topic for May will be preparing for financial aid nights and other related events in the fall. Our training programs are designed to meet the needs of school counselors, college access advisors and financial aid counselors. We continue to participate in and utilize materials provided by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Training for Counselors and Mentors (NT4CM) program.

We expanded our College Goal Sunday program to include additional sites, additional nights and adding Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion lab events at several locations. In addition to the in-person training, we broadcast a session via Interactive Television (ITV) and utilize the ITV phone bank to answer questions. This allows us to reach more, especially rural, families with limited staff resources. We recorded the presentation, re-broadcast it on a different night at different locations and had staff available to answer questions using the ITV phone bank. We then posted the presentation on the Web site so students and families could view the presentation at any time. We added the ability for students to pre-register for the event and receive e-mail reminders. These measures led to a 16 percent increase in attendance this year.

Improving the Web site so that it can be a useful tool instead of just a reference library is a key component to our outreach plan. Creating easy navigation will help students, families and counselors access information. Implementing interactive, yet useful, tools will increase usage, while providing additional information. Some of these tools include an online money management tool and a career exploration tool.

We faced two primary challenges this year: Web Site and creating relationships. The Web site project has taken longer than anticipated. Instead of being completed this spring, it is not expected to be completed until the fall.

The second challenge is more complex. There are areas of Maine, primarily rural areas, where the school counselors and advisors are still skeptical of using an “outside resource.” They are used to doing things for themselves. We are working to overcome this challenge by coordinating with local agencies, such as Upward Bound, to provide joint, complementary sessions. We have begun to see success in working with schools using this approach.

MARYLAND

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Executive Summary:

In May 2008, the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) formed a steering committee to serve in an advisory capacity for the Maryland College Access Challenge Grant Program (MCACGP). The steering committee, consisting of representatives from MHEC, other state agencies, local school systems, and nonprofit organizations was charged with identifying the most appropriate use of the funds to support the preparation of and access to postsecondary education for underrepresented students in Maryland. Maryland's College Access Challenge Grant (MCACG) project focuses services in areas of greatest poverty and lowest achievement in Maryland. Baltimore City and Prince George's County are the two areas in Maryland with the greatest number of low-income, underachieving students. The goals of the MCACG are: (1) to increase college awareness among underrepresented middle school students and their families; (2) to increase the number of underrepresented students taking Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) or Maryland Scholars courses in high school; and (3) to increase the number of underrepresented middle school students with career plans.

To provide services to the middle school students, MHEC is awarding subgrants on a competitive basis to eligible non-profit organizations, including institutions of higher education, or partnerships of organizations to provide outreach services. To qualify for funding, nonprofit organizations must have been in existence on or before September 27, 2007, must provide activities and services related to increasing access to higher education, and must be currently registered with the Maryland Office of the Secretary of the State Charitable Organization Division.

The Baltimore City and Prince George's County school systems identified 24 middle schools eligible to receive services under this grant program. A Request for Applications (RFA) was issued on October 1, 2008 (see MHEC's Web site for the full RFA <http://www.mhec.state.md.us/Grants/MdCollAccessChallGrant/MdCollAccessChallGrant.asp>.)

Two technical assistance meetings were held on October 20, 2008. One was held at Baltimore City Community College - Liberty Campus from 9:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. and the other at Bowie State University from 2:00 p.m.- 4:30 p.m. At these meetings, MHEC presented an overview of the MCACGP, reviewed the RFA, and answered potential applicant's questions.

Applicants could apply for awards up to \$60,000 to a single nonprofit organization working with one or more of the designated middle schools and up to \$150,000 to a partnership of organizations working with at least five of the designated middle schools. Applicant projects were required to provide activities in one or more of the following categories: college awareness activities for underrepresented students and their families; services to increase the number of

underrepresented students taking Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) or Maryland Scholars courses in high school, or career preparation services to underrepresented students.

Eleven proposals were received and reviewed by a selection panel. The following four received awards: Age of Awareness, Inc.; Baltimore City Community College; In Reach, Inc; and the Maryland Institute for Minority Achievement and Urban Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. The recipients will offer a variety of programming to include college and career exploratory activities, financial aid awareness seminars, college tours, and information on the importance of taking rigorous courses in high school. On December 16, 2008, a training session was conducted by MHEC and the Maryland Business Roundtable, at the Howard County Gateway Business and Technology Training Center from 9:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., to train the project directors and staff in the online collection of student data for the state wide evaluation.

One of the challenges with implementing the project was that only four of the applications submitted as a result of the first solicitation were found to be acceptable. A new RFA was issued on January 13, 2009 for additional applications. The Request for Applications (RFA) can be found on MHEC's Web site at <http://www.mhec.state.md.us/Grants/MdCollAccessChallGrant/MdCollAccessChallGrant.asp>. Both Baltimore City and Prince George's County made changes to the list of eligible schools as several of the schools had closed or merged with other schools. Again, technical assistance sessions were held on January 29, 2009 and February 5, 2009 for potential applicants. Both meetings covered the same material: an overview of the MCACG and a review the RFA.

The response for the second solicitation was more favorable than the first. Thirteen applications were received and reviewed by a selection panel. Of these, seven applicants received awards: EduSerc, Inc.; Johns Hopkins University, Department of Counseling; Living Classrooms Foundation; Metropolitan Saturday Academy Science and Technology Program, Inc.; Minority Access, Inc.; Towson University; and the University of Maryland, Baltimore. The recipients will offer a variety of programming to include college and career exploratory activities, financial aid awareness seminars, college tours, and information on the importance of taking rigorous courses in high school.

On April 8, 2009, MHEC met with the Statewide Steering Committee to provide an update on the progress of the grant implementation. The discussion included information on Round 1 and Round 2 solicitations, plans for Year 2, types of project activities, the plans for the MHEC early intervention website, and the planned U.S. Department of Education site visit.

On May 5, 2009, a project director's meeting was conducted by MHEC and the Maryland Business Roundtable, at the Howard County Gateway Business and Technology Training Center from 9:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., to train the project directors and staff in the online collection of student data for the state wide evaluation.

A third RFA was issued on May 4, 2009. The RFA can be found on www.mhec.state.md.us/Grants/MdCollAccessChallGrant/MdCollAccessChallGrant.asp. The Baltimore City and Prince George's County school systems have identified 21 middle schools eligible to receive services under this grant program. Again, grant funds will be awarded

on a competitive basis to eligible nonprofit organizations. Technical assistances sessions will be held on May 14, 2009 and on May 21, 2009 at the Maryland Higher Education Commission, in the Commission Room, from 9:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. At these meetings, MHEC will present an overview of the MCACG, review the RFA, and answer any questions.

MICHIGAN

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Executive Summary:

The College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) for the state of Michigan has been a tremendous success and has positioned us to make substantial progress moving forward on a variety of education initiatives designed to improve educational outcomes across the state. We have made substantial progress toward implementation consistent with the goals and activities outlined in our grant application and we have made a number of changes that we expect will position Michigan to maximize the potential of year two funds. We begin by outlining the highlights of the work accomplished to date. Next we outline what work is to be completed with year one funds and we conclude with anticipated changes to our plan based upon the first years experiences and informed by a number of interested groups who are now a part of the college access conversation who were not at the table a year ago.

Direct Service to Students:

There are three key elements in our CACG strategy which provide direct service to students in year one and our progress was very good. First, College Goal Sunday served more than 2,600 high school seniors applying to college for the first time. This number is 51 percent higher than participation last year (2008). Second, EduGuide established and tested a new online college mentoring tool and have successfully tested it with more than 2,000 students and parents from low-income families. The site is designed to provide information and encouragement to students engaged in the college decision process and it is also intended to provide direct counseling services to students and parents. Nearly half of the participants in the beta site utilized the personalized advising and counseling function. Third, more than 60,000 students received the EduGuide publications intended to help students think about and engage in the process of planning for and applying to college.

Indirect Effects on Students:

Professional development is key to any successful college access strategy and we engaged in several important activities. The first was the creation of a professional development web community for school counselors and admissions professionals. These are the individuals most directly responsible for providing information to students and parents. We recognize that their work can be isolating and that when engaged with one another, they can improve their own understanding of college access and provide support for one another as they continue to serve much higher numbers of students than is recommended. Second, EduGuide has created a series of professional development training sessions and they have already provided that training nine times to more than 500 counselors. An additional nine sessions are scheduled before August 31, 2009. We recognize that while it is difficult to account for the students impacted by this

investment that clearly many more students will benefit from the better-informed college counselors in high school. Third, we have established the foundation for a new volunteer program designed around a model in Massachusetts called “college positive volunteerism” The Michigan Campus Compact has launched a planning phase partnering with eight campuses to recruit and train college positive volunteers that will work with high schools and community organizations to help students and parents access the information they need to make good decisions about going to college. They have issued initial grants to those campuses and are in the process of developing the curriculum for volunteers.

Establishing a Statewide Infrastructure:

While the accomplishments above are critical to the direct service to students and parents, arguably our most important strides have been made in terms of developing a college access infrastructure in the state of Michigan. Over the past several years, the state has taken a number of important steps toward improving its college participation and completion outcomes. In particular, we have expanded and refined our signature state scholarship program – the Michigan Promise Scholarship – to cover the equivalent of two years of college tuition, we have adopted the Michigan Merit Curriculum which is arguably the most rigorous college preparatory curriculum in the country, and we have engaged in a process of rethinking our teacher preparation and continuing education programs. Additionally, we have adopted the ACT as the high school exam for 100 percent of our high school juniors. This is the backdrop for the college access challenge grant in Michigan.

As part of the grant we have engaged in three primary activities – creation of a college access network, adoption of a college access web portal, and incorporation local providers in the statewide college access conversation. The Michigan college access network (MCAN) became a part of our conversation after the initial grant application was submitted and it will reflect the partnership of the state and the philanthropic community in conjunction with educators and business leaders. The National College Access Network (NCAN) has been instrumental in our process. We began by conducting an initial college access scan modeled after NCAN’s process as implemented in Ohio and other states. That process has proven particularly useful and we will begin to apply a similar approach to connecting local community efforts in a more thorough and targeted way. The College Access Network has been officially announced by the Governor and should be operating fully by the beginning of 2010.

Next, we have engaged in a year long conversation surrounding the creation of a more effective and integrated web-strategy to provide students and parents with the right information in the right ways and at the right times as they go through the college decision process. Our strategy is comprised of four components, of which the college access web portal is one key piece. In addition to a portal that brings the best information together in one place, we recognize that three other ingredients are essential to see any success. First, we need to engage is a statewide media campaign to promote going to college and to make students and parents aware of the resource. That is in large part why we have elected to apply to be a “Know How to Go” state through the Lumina Foundation. All of the KH2G established materials will be made available to us, which will reduce our costs and allow us to focus our resources on other elements. Second, we recognize that all communities have unique sets of assets and challenges and as such we must develop tailored approaches in each community. This is in part why we hosted community forums and provided regional data profiles of educational opportunity to local stakeholders. This

goes hand in hand with the recently passed promise zone legislation intended to promote the creation of more community-based strategies modeled after the success of the Kalamazoo Promise. Third, in order to be effective in communities and to complement the work of counselors, we believe a coaching model is essential to empower more individuals to help students and parents use the tools. The College Positive Volunteerism approach fits this need well.

Next Steps for Year 2:

Year one of the College Access Grant began a new conversation in Michigan, which has brought clarity to an evolving college access strategy. In year two we plan to launch, test, and rigorously evaluate the college access web portal; develop and expand the college access network; and engage volunteers to be effective college access advocates in local communities. We will also launch the Know How to Go Campaign anticipating that our application to participate will be accepted. We have also been successful generating enthusiasm among potential funders, making the prospect of sustainability much more likely.

MINNESOTA

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Executive Summary:

Current Status of Project

The Minnesota College Access Challenge Grant (MCACG) project was developed to support the program's legislated intent to provide professional development for school counselors to improve their capacity to support students and parents with preparing and financing college and to provide information and outreach to low-income parents and students regarding planning and financing college and career preparation. Activities designed to advance these objectives include: first-year licensure of Web-based counseling software for selected schools with training and installation, providing through regional user groups professional development for school counselors on the effective use of Web-based counseling systems, providing professional development in the form of "data retreats" for school counselors to increase their understanding of data collected through standard student assessments so they are able to use the data toward postsecondary readiness, providing professional development for counselors to increase their understanding of comprehensive school counseling programs, and training community professionals to deliver information on financial aid and college preparation. The Minnesota program is experiencing success through work with 132 schools in the use of Naviance, the Web-based counseling software, work with 163 counselors in regionally-based workshops on the effective use of the Educational Planning Assessment System, and the training of 52 professionals for subsequent delivery of financial aid workshops to a total of 236 individuals (107 parents and 129 students). Initiation of one program activity, provision of professional development to school counselors to increase their understanding of comprehensive school counseling programs, is being delayed until year two in order to build on year-one activities and to reformulate this activity to use instate vendors.

Extent of Implementation of Program Activities and Components

Program implementation is preceding in all activity areas except one. The first-year licensure of Web-based counseling software for selected schools has been completed in 132 school sites, and different levels of training for the schools' counselors are being provided. The submitted application for funding indicated that we would support licensure of 300 school sites. Because of the limited counselor staffing at school sites in Minnesota, this larger number was not reached, and the decision was made to provide enhanced support and additional Naviance programs to the 132 sites. Regional user groups to support school counselors in their effective use of the Naviance web-based software are being coordinated by the Minnesota Association for College Admissions Counseling (MACAC). Having MACAC partner in this activity strengthens communication between middle and high school counselors and college admissions counselors, enhances the knowledge of each group's work with their targeted student population and

supports overall efforts to assure student postsecondary success. Outreach to low-income families was provided, and 107 parents and 129 students participated in nine financial aid sessions. One program activity--the provision of professional development for school counselors at middle and secondary schools to increase their understanding of comprehensive school counseling programs, specifically the American School Counseling Association's model--was not implemented. This program activity will be implemented during year two and will draw upon state level resources including the current president of the American School Counseling Association to assist with implementation that builds on the outcomes of year one program activities with school counselors.

Major Outcomes, Successes and Challenges

Major outcomes and successes have been referenced in the previous section. Challenges for the program include reaching and addressing the needs of Minnesota's increasingly diverse student population. With the largest Somali population outside of East Africa in the Minneapolis/St. Paul Metropolitan Area, a proposed change in grant implementation would support delivery of targeted outreach sessions on college preparation and financing by a Somali educator at mosques attended by the Somali community. Over the past decade, the number of Hispanics in Minnesota has increased 166 percent, and a proposed change to program implementation would provide additional family outreach efforts by the Minnesota Get Ready/Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) program to Hispanic families and exploration of successful models for outreach to targeted parents and communities. The number of identified low-income schools in Minnesota has increased; and during the 2008-2009 school year, the Office of Higher Education and Minnesota's public and private colleges and universities contracted with CLIMB Theatre to develop and deliver an engaging musical performance to help eighth graders understand the power they have to affect their futures through academic persistence. A proposed change in grant implementation would allow Minnesota's College Access Challenge Grant Program to partner with Minnesota's higher education institutions in delivering ten additional musical performance and follow-up classes to eighth grade students attending low-income schools across Minnesota. These challenges to the program can be addressed by the changes indicated--changes that will provide for more community-based, face-to-face interactions about college preparation and financing.

MISSOURI

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Executive Summary:

The purpose of the College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) program is to support states in helping students and families learn about, prepare for, and finance a postsecondary education. The Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE) is implementing this grant to assist in and support identifying successful strategies to increase the participation of underserved populations in Missouri postsecondary education. The goal of the MDHE and the project is to increase the rates at which Missourians attend and succeed in higher education through the establishment of a competitive subgrant program; developing web-based financial information, and distributing financial literacy materials to students, teachers and guidance counselors.

Competitive Sub-grant Process

The MDHE has established a subgrant program for eligible, not-for-profit, philanthropic and consortia organizations as part of the CACG program. The request for proposals and the resulting funded projects focused on providing information to students and families about postsecondary education benefits, opportunities, and planning; providing information on financing options; conducting outreach activities for students who may be at risk of not enrolling in or completing college; or assisting students in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

All grant proposals were required to meet the guidelines established by the federal statute. Twenty eligible not-for-profit, philanthropic and consortia organizations expressed an interest in the program. Due to an economic decline, only fourteen of these organizations applied for the grant. A panel of external reviewers from secondary and postsecondary education assisted in reviewing grant proposals. Grants were awarded to nine institutions in May 2009.

Web-based Information

The MDHE is currently developing a Web portal designed to provide a unified, targeted and appealing one-stop Internet destination for Missouri students and families to learn about higher education and the planning and preparation that are necessary to succeed in education beyond high school. The MDHE has established a planning committee, which includes a range of backgrounds and expertise, to provide the requirements and guidelines for the redesign of the MDHE's current website. Originally, the department envisioned four MDHE Information Technology (IT) staff would be assigned part-time to this Web project during this period to begin the development process for the site. Due to IT workload on other projects, work on the web portal has not proceeded as originally projected. As a result, implementation will likely be delayed into the next award cycle.

Financial Literacy Materials

The MDHE is currently focusing considerable effort in the area of financial literacy and planning for high school and entering college students and their families. Entering college materials have been developed and are currently being distributed. The department is developing and will distribute financial literacy information, including a mini-curriculum that will be adapted for classroom teachers or guidance counselors, for high school students and their families. The MDHE plans to produce 38,000 sets of the high school financial literacy materials. Each set will consist of topic based expansion folders, a financial success calendar/planner, and a Roadmap to Postsecondary Success brochure. Materials will also include a mini-curriculum for teachers and may include other materials identified as planning is completed.

MISSISSIPPI

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Executive Summary:

The overall objective of Mississippi's College Access Challenge (MCACG) project, which is part of the College Knowledge project, is to increase early awareness of post-secondary education opportunities for low-income middle school students and their families. We have launched a statewide multimedia campaign, but we are targeting other outreach efforts to the high-poverty, traditionally underserved regions of the Mississippi Delta and Southwest Mississippi. In the Delta we are working with 22 middle schools in 11 public school districts in eight counties; in Southwest Mississippi we are working with 14 middle schools in eight public school districts in eight counties. Four College Access Coordinators are providing direct services in the two target areas. College Knowledge guides encouraging early college planning will be distributed in these areas. To promote early college planning and career advising, the College Knowledge project will also provide school counselors the opportunity to participate in a content-rich college and career advising training initiative. The Mississippi Council on Economic Education (MCEE) has trained target school staff to implement the Financial Fitness for Life (FFL) curriculum for the 7,000 students in the participating schools. Also, we have partnered with GEAR UP to launch Mississippi's first-ever College Goal Sunday event.

Build Public Awareness of College Access Web site through Multimedia Campaign and Grassroots Efforts: **Multimedia Campaign** - The College Knowledge project launched a multimedia campaign to raise public awareness of Mississippi's new college access portal – www.mississippi.edu. This portal includes three unique entry points designed to support student access to postsecondary education statewide. Rise Up (www.riseupms.com) is the entry point for middle and high school students. Parent Guide 2 College (www.parentguide2college) is the entry point for parents, caregivers and mentors. A third entry point, not supported through the CACG is Think Higher Mississippi (www.thinkhigherms.com) which serves transfer students and adult learners. The Web sites offer information and resources to support the college-going aspirations of all students and their families. The statewide multimedia campaign, which promotes Rise Up and Parent Guide 2 College, was launched in the fourth quarter of 2008 and includes TV (three 30-second spots), radio (three 30-second spots), Internet ad placement and search optimization, brochures, posters, and outdoor billboards (eight billboards placed in target regions). Since launching the Web site in October 2008 and the multimedia campaign the following month, the Web site has received on average 33,000 hits per month from all geographic regions of the state. Two thousand-one hundred – eighteen individuals have established personal profiles/accounts on the site (accounts not required). Average time on the site is three minutes and 30 seconds and the average bounce rate is 38.9 percent.

Grassroots efforts - College Access Coordinators, Toolkits and Student Guides: Four college access coordinators were hired in April 2009 to provide direct services in our targeted regions. Their charge is to convey the primary message of the College Knowledge project - that the knowledge to get to college is well within reach. The college access coordinators are visiting schools now in support of the financial literacy component, disseminating information about the college access website to students and school staff, while coordinating the development of community partnerships in the targeted communities. The college access coordinators are participating in college planning and preparation training sessions that will enable them to do more than simply distribute information but to understand the implications of early planning and preparation for low-income students who are most likely first-in-the-family to attend college and to develop meaningful workshops and presentations to students, their families and potential community mentors and supporters. Toolkits are being compiled to assist the coordinators with any topic that may arise related to college access. These toolkits will later be adapted to share with youth mentors. Our challenge is to provide effective outreach to parents thus enabling them to assist and encourage their children to take advantage of postsecondary education opportunities. A second challenge is to attract community members to embrace the message of college access and become active partners in the College Knowledge project. Middle school guides, College Knowledge for Mississippi Students, have been developed to provide middle school students with tangible information about preparing for life after high school.

College Knowledge: Strategies for School Counselors in College and Career Advising - Counselors have a substantial impact on students' college aspirations and plans. In recognition of that, we worked with the Southern Regional Education Board's Go Alliance to develop a comprehensive college and career advising curriculum. The *College Knowledge: Strategies for School Counselors in College and Career Advising* course curriculum is supported by funding from USA Funds. These funds support the cost of curriculum development, facilitator training, online and in-person learning sites, the cost of awarding Continuing Education (CEU) and all other expenses associated with this professional development opportunity. Counselors and other experts in college access contributed substantial input resulting in a course built on the knowledge, skills and abilities that counselors need to help students. The course content focuses on all aspects of career planning and college advising including, but not limited to, professional goal development, online readings, activities, action plans, discussion prompts encouraging professional networking and other supplemental resources and readings. In Mississippi, the *College Knowledge* course will be available in two formats – through face-to-face workshops in our target regions beginning this summer and on-line through the Blackboard course management system at Mississippi State University in the fall. The course includes three modules each with four sessions requiring approximately 32 hours for completion. The three modules require approximately 96 hours for completion. Counselors earn CEU's for successful completion of the *College Knowledge* course modules. As an added plus, our six course facilitators participated in the course development as content experts. Five are school counselors with vast experience and one is a professor of counseling and education psychology at Mississippi State University. Our challenge is to ensure that counselors in our target schools have the necessary training to understand the pivotal role they play in communicating the critical importance of a rigorous curriculum coupled with clear and accurate college and career path advising

to students most in need. Research has shown that this understanding is crucial in the development of a college-going culture in schools and to improving the overall college-going rate in the state.

Financial Literacy Training - Financial Fitness for Life and College Goal Sunday: the Mississippi Council on Economic Education (MCEE) is guided by the principle of giving children what they need to succeed. The role of MCEE in the College Knowledge project is to help middle school students develop grade-appropriate financial literacy skills in order to apply the “economic way of thinking” to college preparation and planning. To date, MCEE has trained 65 school staff in the implementation of the Financial Fitness for Life curriculum (FFL), provided support through emails and telephone contact and conducted site visits to 29 schools (17 school districts) in the Delta and Southwest Mississippi. The FFL post-test surveys indicate a statistically significant average increase in students’ knowledge of 22 points. One hundred students scoring 90 percent or above on the post test were to be awarded \$50 each; notably, the post-tests revealed that the top 100 students actually scored 94 or above. Seven of the target schools participated in a research component measuring attitudinal change directed by Mississippi State University. The results will be available in August 2009 and will inform project practices. In addition, we partnered with Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) Mississippi to launch Mississippi’s first-ever College Goal Sunday event. Approximately 400 families attended the event at one of 22 sites statewide to receive help in completing the FAFSA. Nearly 250 volunteers assisted with the day’s events. In addition, 22 (one per site) students received \$500 scholarships, which will be applied directly to the postsecondary institution the student chooses to attend. One challenge we face is to provide the FFL curriculum with incentives to entering 6th grade students and to develop reinforcement and practice activities for rising 7th and 8th graders already trained in the FFL curriculum. Another challenge of the College Knowledge project is to support a seamless continuum of college planning activities that integrates college access prep and planning with the economic way of thinking, sound decision-making skills, and knowledge of financial aid.

MONTANA

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Executive Summary:

The first year of the Montana College Access Challenge Grant (MCACG) project – go2collegeMT – is on track for first-year completion by August 31, 2009. We presented the project for progress review to a joint meeting of the Montana Board of Regents, Board of Education, Office of Public Instruction (K-12), Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE)/Montana University System (MUS), and the Governor’s Office on January 8, 2008. On May 14, 2009 the Montana CACG project progress was presented to the Montana Education, Kindergarten through College workgroup, by members of the Governor’s Office. This presentation included an in-progress, demonstration of the go2collegeMT.org Web site.

The framework for the MCACG project Web site – go2collegeMT.org – is set up on secure servers in the IT Department of the MSU campus and development and testing of the site is underway. Development of the site will continue through August 31, 2009. The site is designed for easy updating of information and addition or changes of “features” that include related information from all Montana education.

Extent of implementation of all program activities and components in coordination with Montana OPI, OCHE/MUS, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP):

Major outcomes, successes, and challenges: As proposed in the June 2008 CACG proposal of the Montana CACG project, we have created – go2collegeMT.org – as “an engaging new resource for Montana students and families, school counselors, college admissions officers, and financial aid officers.” In addition to aggregating a variety of existing Montana sources of information of value to underrepresented students, we have been working along with the many organizations and agencies in Montana dedicated to education. The MCACG team has been and continues to develop new elements, identified in the original MCACG proposal, that are not currently present in the Montana education system. These new elements will improve communication throughout the Montana education system with existing as well as new programs and increase access to information about remaining in school and attending college to underrepresented students throughout Montana. Examples follow:

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms: The Montana CACG project team attended Montana College Goal Sundays and made videos of underrepresented Montana families filling out FAFSA forms and interviewed them, for display on the go2collegeMT Web site. The experience of those families can now be shared with hundreds if not thousands of

underrepresented Montana students and their families. A tutorial on filling out the FAFSA forms is under development. Reaching more underrepresented students and their families and encouraging them to fill out and submit their forms is a key goal to the Montana CACG project.

OPI – Poster Series – “Honor Your Self:” The Montana CACG project team conducted and videotaped interviews with the subjects of the OPI Poster Series – “Honor Your Self.” While 38 people attended and saw the announcement of the OPI Poster Series in the State Capitol Building, video interviews with the Poster subjects can be now be seen by Montanans on go2collegeMT, Youtube, iTunes University.

Creation of a Montana PLE: Introducing Web2.0 technology to Montana Education: The concept of a “Personal Learning Environment” or PLE is a good way, for both educators and students, to aggregate seemingly disparate elements of Web2.0 technology that can be otherwise baffling, into the education system,. The Montana education PLE, in this CACG project, includes blogging technology, Google (search, maps, etc.), YouTube, Twitter, MySpace, Flickr, Ning, iTunes K-12, Facebook, and is opened ended to include new software as it appears and proves to be beneficial to educational communications. Montana CACG personnel already teach classes in the use of these software and will create tutorials on the Montana CACG project go2collegeMT Web site.

GEAR UP for non-GEAR UP schools: In addition to meeting with schools and presenting the Montana CACG project at the 2008 Montana GEAR UP conference, we have initiated a “GEAR UP success for non-GEAR UP schools” in Montana. Currently there are 25 GEAR UP schools in Montana. The CACG-go2collegeMT will make available GEAR UP information to all 180 high schools in Montana, through go2collegeMT. We have also met with TRIO and discussed similar coordination with Educational Talent Search and Upward Bound representatives in Montana.

Virtual Montana College Fairs: The Montana CACG project team has met with MPSEOC (Montana Post Secondary Educational Opportunities Council) about creating Virtual College Fairs on go2collegeMT.org that will supplement and complement the existing MPSEOC Montana College Fairs held in September of each year throughout Montana. The Montana OCHE/MUS suggested to the Montana CACG team to meet with MPSEOC and this project was identified as one of the most effective ways to meet the goals of CACG. OCHE/MUS, and MPSEOC in reaching underrepresented students and their families, and school counselors in Montana by extending Montana’s existing investment in the time and effort to hold the Montana College Fairs.

Online College Selector: As planned, the Montana CACG team attended the 2009 MSCA conference and met with numerous members (school counselors). In direct response to a Montana school counselor’s request, go2collegeMT is developing the Montana Online College Selector. Counselors will be able to assist students with identifying which college/university suites their preferences and students themselves will have access to this capability and can visit their counselor and try a variety of their own choices and find out which colleges to consider. This capability will also be available to the students online, directly.

Montana Challenges: Montana is making progress, but is not yet complete with high-speed internet connection to all schools and colleges in Montana. Also, due to unfamiliarity with the

educational use and benefits of certain websites or software, on occasion, computer users within the Montana education system find themselves “blocked” from accessing or using certain software or accessing certain websites. Nationwide, the issue of students bringing digital devices of their own, into schools is being addressed and Montana is no exception. One goal of go2collegeMT is to demonstrate and provide the content for legitimate educational connections throughout the state, so that Montanans become more familiar with the communications technology that is in common use globally. The knowledge of and capability of using such Web-based technology will prepare all Montana students for educational and career success.

Additional Project Areas Under Development / Part Two (4/15/09-8/31/09) work includes:

Montana Mentors / Inspiration: Working with the Montana OCHE, the Montana AIMA (American Indian/Minority Achievement Director), TRIO, Upward Bound, Educational Talent Search, the go2collegeMT Web site will offer direct “student-to-mentor” communication. Students will be able to go onto the go2collegeMT Web site and select the mentor they most would like to communicate with regarding their questions about going to college.

Montana College of Nursing “Care For Our Own” program: American Indian nurses are seriously underrepresented in the professional nursing workforce, thus creating a critical need for more professional nursing education opportunities for American Indian men and women. Health care of the American Indian people can be improved by increasing the number of nurses with bachelor’s degrees in nursing who can provide clinically excellent and culturally sensitive care to their people. CACG is working with the Montana College of Nursing to bring this career-path opportunity program, online for underrepresented students in Montana as part of go2collegeMT.

NEBRASKA

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Executive Summary:

The Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education identified \$100,000 of the \$330,000 CACG federal grant to be used for low-income high school students to take college courses while still in high school and receive college credit plus high school credit in most instances. This program is identified as the Access College Early (ACE) program. As of March 2009, the Commission awarded 351 scholarships for dual enrollment scholarships utilizing all the \$100,000 College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) funding allocated to this project. In addition, the State of Nebraska funds were used to provide dual enrollment scholarships to 406 low-income high school students.

The Commission planned to work with high school counselors to encourage them to identify qualified low-income high school students to apply for ACE scholarships. The Commission's financial aid coordinator presented ACE information at several counselor education seminars organized by EducationQuest, a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing college enrollment. The financial aid coordinator further assisted high school counselors in evaluating low-income students and students with significant hardships to increase the number of students applying for the scholarships.

The program administered by the Commission—Access College Early (ACE) program—accomplished all of its identified goals for 2008-09. With the \$100,000 CACG funding, ACE scholarship recipients increased by 351 low-income students, almost doubling the number of ACE recipients in 2007-08. However, 311 low-income students applied for the ACE scholarship in 2008-09 but did not receive a scholarship due to a lack of available funds. This data was presented to the Legislatures' Appropriations Committee resulting in the Legislature increasing state funding by \$180,000 for next year—2009-10. The CACG funding has been instrumental in increased state funding for the ACE program.

Subgrantees:

All the subgrantees have had a slower start than the Commission mainly due to starting or gearing-up an identified program. However, all of the sub-grantees are progressing very well.

Making the Connection (FutureForce Nebraska)

The number one goal of the project was to provide access to the "Nebraska Career Connection." This has been accomplished and provided career and higher education information to over 45,500 students. Further, 40% of all middle schools have access to Nebraska Career Connections.

“Learning for Life, Exploring Tomorrow” (Cornhusker Council BSA)

Increasing the number of schools participating in Boy Scouts and this new project began slowly, but currently there are 17 new schools. Teacher in-service training of “ethical decision making” for economically disadvantaged students has been implemented in 50 percent of the schools. Approximately 200 students and families participated in college planning events and increased their awareness of financing opportunities and requirements for college.

Pipeline to College (Creighton University)

Increased the awareness of math and science related to health careers. Administered pre-tests to 200 students. The post-list will be given in the summer. All goals and objectives have been met, but will continue the program this summer so it fits with the program in 2009-10.

Access to a College Education Program (Metropolitan Community College)

Very successful program at getting students/parents on the college track. All participants (25) for the first year will graduate on time and 96 percent reported they have completed a college application plus intend to enroll in college fall of 2009.

Expanding Chadron State College’s Educational Family (Chadron State College)

The project started slowly because of the need to gain the trust of the middle school administrators so discussions could take place regarding changes to the math and science curriculum. Progress has been made and will intensify in the next grant year. Outreach activities touch 45 parents and students regarding completion of FAFSAs, information on need-based aid, and requirements for college.

NORTH CAROLINA

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Executive Summary:

The North Carolina College Access Challenge (NC CACG) Grant project is pleased to report that it has expanded and enhanced the current college access efforts in the state through a strong collaborative partnership of the University of North Carolina General Administration, the North Carolina Community College System, the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority, and the pre-college programs housed on North Carolina colleges and universities. As part of a larger comprehensive statewide college access initiative, the UNC Tomorrow Commission, to expand education and overcome the future challenges of the state, the NC CACG continues to build upon and strengthen existing college access efforts to increase the number of students prepared to enroll and succeed in college, with a particular emphasis on low income students, students from underserved areas, and students from underrepresented populations. All partners have completely supported the efforts of the NC CACG through regular attendance of meetings and successful implementation of NC CACG program activities.

With the exception of those few activities hampered by the unprecedented economic and budgetary constraints, the NC CACG and its partners have implemented all program activities planned for this reporting period and are on track to meet or exceed all goals and objectives. The NC CACG has encouraged postsecondary enrollment by expanding access to information about course transferability between North Carolina community colleges and senior institutions within the state. Led by the UNC General Administration and assisted by the North Carolina Community College System and the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, the NC CACG has developed the CFNC Transfer Navigator, which provides course transfer equivalencies to students. Though only in its first phase, the CFNC Transfer Navigator has already increased information about course equivalencies for transfer students by nearly 180 percent during the first year of the grant.

The NC CACG has engaged in outreach activities for students who may be at risk of not enrolling in or completing postsecondary education. The North Carolina College Application Week, which targets high schools with a rate of 35 percent or more students on free or reduced lunch, has enjoyed support by the North Carolina's Office of the Governor and in 2008 increased the number of participating sites by 168 percent. The NC College Application Week offers low-income students the opportunity to apply to any of the state's colleges and universities at no cost. The North Carolina Community College system does not charge an admissions application fee at any of its 58 campuses, while 31 of the private college and universities were free to apply to during the NC College Application Week event. In addition, waivers of admissions application fees for students with a demonstrated financial need and for whom an application fee would

create an undue burden are provided at the remaining five private colleges and universities as well as all of the 16 University North Carolina system campuses. The NC CACG also supports two programs designed to increase graduation and retention rates among minority males in North Carolina's community colleges and other institutions of higher education.

Beyond the NC College Application Week event, the NC CACG has witnessed other college access and outreach programming successes. FAFSA Day provides statewide assistance to students in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. The 2009 FAFSA Day had a 25 percent increase in participation from the previous year, while the number of participating counties continued to rise. In addition, the Learn and Earn Online program offers public high school students the ability to enroll in college courses at no cost. This program has increased the number of participating students by 118 percent and expanded the number of schools included by 132 percent during the past year alone.

The NC CACG has begun the process of developing a database for all pre-college programs in North Carolina. Being piloted by four Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grants in North Carolina, one State grantee and three Partnership grantees, this system will allow pre-college programs in the state to maximize their effectiveness by having one common portal for student level data. Eventually, this system will be expanded to other pre-college programs in North Carolina at community colleges, private and public universities, local education agencies, and nonprofit organizations.

As the NC CACG moves into the second year of its grant, it will not only maintain the above successes, but also enact projects that will continue the mission of the NC CACG. Subsequent updates to the CFNC Transfer Navigator will allow students to view transfer course equivalencies between every college and university in North Carolina by 2010. An update of the North Carolina Directory of Pre-College Programs will be produced in 2010, as will financial aid material designed to enhance students' knowledge of planning and paying for college. The North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities is developing a College Access Network among its pre-college programs that will allow, along with the renewal of the NC College Access Conference and the Minority Male Mentoring Conference, greater professional development opportunities for guidance counselors, financial aid administrators, and college admissions counselors.

Though it did have many successes, the NC CACG did face challenges during the first year of the grant. The nationwide economic crisis has affected some of the proposed activities of the NC CACGP. A projected \$3.3 billion shortfall in the state budget has caused travel restrictions that have severely limited participation in professional development activities and events designed to highlight promising pre-college program strategies. The 2009 NC College Access Conference, to be the 8th annual event, was cancelled in December 2008 due to insufficient attendance because of travel restrictions, as was the Minority Male Mentoring Conference. Despite these economic barriers, the NC CACG partners creatively worked to overcome the financial obstacles by using such methods as webinars and telephone conferencing to collaboratively work together to maintain its core goal of expanding current pre-college access and outreach programs.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

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Executive Summary:

Background Information on Grant Design and Implementation:

In August 2008, the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) awarded a \$330,000 College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) to the State of New Hampshire and Governor John Lynch designated the Postsecondary Education Commission (PEC) to be the program administrator. PEC consulted with its statewide non-profit partners to identify programs that improve access, retention and completion of students in postsecondary programs. PEC also sought funding for its loan repayment program which encourages entry into high-need workforce areas. Attachment #1 provides a brief description of PEC and the four CACG grantee partner organizations

The State of New Hampshire (NH) has a cumbersome approval process for accepting grants. Approval to “accept and expend” must be received from the joint fiscal committee of the legislature *and* the Executive Council. During the grant “accept and expend” approval process, the original objective of implementing a statewide assessment to high school juniors through the NH Department of Education was eliminated and the funds were reallocated to the scholarship/tuition assistance line for additional loan repayments. Due to several changes in meeting dates, final approval was not obtained until January 14, 2009. This meant that, prior to that date, grantee partners could only expend matching funds and could not commit funds for program expansion. As a result, there were delays in program implementation for several partner grantees.

CACG Program Collaboration

Since October 2008, CACG program partners have met on a monthly basis to:

- Ensure understanding and compliance with CACG reporting and to share information provided at the CACG training conference.
- Promote each others programs and share information about their programs activities and upcoming events.
- Share program literature, evaluation surveys, and activity formats.
- Discuss coordination of services at the high school level. One member proposed the development of a menu of offerings provided by outreach partners, and she volunteered to do this for North Country schools.
- Compare notes and solicit ideas for dealing with the challenges of establishing and/or expanding programs at the local school level.
- Encourage participation in an annual “NH Access Showcase” and regional programs that brought together outreach service providers

- Invite a representative from the NH Department of Education to explain the implementation of the state's student identifier system and the development of a data collection system that allows public schools to report a variety of student level information. This allowed CACG partners to learn about options they may or may not have for tracking students involved with CACG.

The following attachments provide a holistic overview of all five CACG programs:

- Grid that illustrates the types of services being delivered
- Profile of participating high schools
- State map of service locations

Highlights of Outcomes, Successes and Challenges for Partner Grantees (for Year One):

Individual program descriptions and progress to date are outlined on the following pages.

(1) NH College & University Council: State Scholars Initiative (SSI)

Program Description

SSI is a national program designed to motivate students, beginning in grade 8, to complete a rigorous course of study in high school. In New Hampshire, the program was piloted by four school districts during the 2006-07 school year. At the beginning of the 2008-09 school year there were 12 participating districts. Between the fall of 2006 through spring 2008, NH Scholars school districts dramatically increased course enrollments; doubling enrollment in algebra, tripling enrollment in physics and increasing enrollment in foreign languages by 25 percent.

CACG funding was sought to increase the number of school districts, add new business partnerships, and expand professional training for guidance personnel.

CACG Activities, Outcomes, Successes and Challenges

Major activities have focused on the recruitment of new schools and supporting the administration of the program at existing SSI school districts. This included 62 meetings that were held between October 2008 and March 31, 2009. By the spring of 2009, SSI has been implemented in 16 districts and 19 high schools (an increase of seven high schools from the prior school year). This summer information will be available about SSI graduates for the current school year and projections can be made for the number of students who will be participating in the 2009-10 school year.

The NH SSI State Director has also focused on doubling the number of existing business partners. He estimates that they currently have about 50 active partners and plans to add 50 more. Going forward, SSI is asking each participating district to submit an annual report that will identify the business partners. Corollary successes associated with this effort include:

- Forging of a relationship with the NH Human Resources Association who will actively promote participation in SSI to its members.
- Developing a centralized database of speakers who can be tapped for presentations to students.
- Recruiting members for a Leadership Board comprised of prominent CEOs from a diverse group of employers such as Southern NH University, Delta Dental, Anthem, and the NH Business & Industry Association. They will meet in June to provide feedback and recommendations on a core curriculum.

The SSI director also partnered with the NH Department of Education (NHDOE) to incorporate information on State Scholars participants into the newly launched student database and allow SSI to obtain graduation information. NHDOE has also contracted with the National Student Clearinghouse to obtain information on students who continue on to postsecondary education.

One of SSI's major challenges is the prevailing culture of local control. Nearly every district has its own high school, requiring repeated recruitment efforts to principals. Moreover, some districts want to develop their own model for a rigorous curriculum. To this end, NH SSI staff will conduct a state by state comparison of core courses and review how they align with admission requirements at NH colleges. Another challenge is how to assist school personnel find an easier way to enter student information on the state's student database.

(2) Granite State Management & Resources (a NHHEAF Network Organization): Center for College Planning (CCP) North Country Project

Program Description

For over fifteen years, CCP has provided students and families, from all demographic sectors, with valuable information and guidance about the college planning process. On an annual basis, CCP provides services to 30,000 students and their families that include free materials, classroom and evening presentations, individual counseling, a searchable database for NH scholarships, "Destination College" (an annual convention for juniors and their parents), and a special program for foster children. CACG funding was obtained to increase CCP outreach services in the "North Country" (defined as the three most northern counties in the state which includes 13 high schools and their feeder schools). The North Country has the most underserved population in the state.

CACG Activities, Outcomes, Successes and Challenges

In the fall of 2008, CCP spent CACG matching funds to distribute 4,518 pieces of literature to K-12 students and families in the North Country. See Attachment #6 for a list of these publications and Attachment #7 for a list of programs.

In February 2009, two part-time college outreach specialists were hired to staff the North Country initiative. They have undergone an intensive CCP training program and are mentored by other outreach specialists. By the end of May, the specialists will have met with guidance counselors from each of the North Country high schools to share information about existing CCP programs or other appropriate programming that could be delivered to students during the 2009-10 academic year. During these meetings, the specialists are also collecting data on students pursuing higher education, taking the SAT, etc. The specialists are also beginning their work with middle and elementary schools to identify early awareness programming opportunities.

For the period 9/1/08 through 3/30/09, in-school presentations have been made to 523 students. The delay in funding certainly impacted recruitment of staff and scheduling of additional programs for this academic year. Outcomes relating to increasing the number of students enrolled in postsecondary education will be done by monitoring continuation rates for high schools on an annual basis.

Examples of current successes are a CCP-sponsored “Moonjar” classroom activity in April 2009 at Gorham Elementary School. This program was developed by the NH Jump\$Start Coalition and teaches second grade students about spending, sharing, and saving money. Plans are underway to host a guidance counselor training for North Country guidance counselors on Friday, May 29, 2009 at White Mountain Community College, the only college in our North Country service area. During the training, counselors will learn about the programs and services the Center for College Planning offers, and learn the basics of financial aid and preparing for college. In addition, eleven students from Lin-Wood High School recently visited a local community college in Concord and then attended a “College Preparation for Juniors” workshop at the CCP offices.

The continuing challenge of making an impact in a rural area that has relied on a dying industry (pulp and paper), is daunting. Other challenges include the physical distance between schools, the difficulty of scheduling programs during the winter months (inclement weather), and overcoming the perception of students and parents in a depressed economic situation that college is unaffordable.

(3) Campus Compact for NH/VISTA

Program Description

Campus Compact for NH administers an AmeriCorps*VISTA project that places VISTAs on college and university campuses to develop and support college access partnership programs that serve low income students at risk of not enrolling in postsecondary education. CACG funding was sought to increase the number of VISTA volunteers assigned to colleges around the state to engage with students, and secondly to inventory and assess current campus-based, K-12 and community college access, retention, and completion outreach programs.

CACG Activities and Outcomes

A VISTA Volunteer was placed at the Campus Compact for NH office on February 18, 2009 to support the following two components:

- (1) Inventory and assess current college access, retention, and completion programs in NH. A survey (Attachment #8) was sent to 24 NH colleges in April. Results will be shared through Project ARC which links outreach projects in the state through newsletters, workshops, an access showcase, and training.
- (2) Develop a “peer approach” curriculum that can be used by a panel of traveling college students who will make presentations to middle and high schools and out-of-school programs. The following panels have been scheduled: on May 21st the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Nashua will host a panel for approximately 20 students, on June 3rd Memorial HS will host a panel for approximately 50 students in Manchester; on October 23, Southern NH University will host panels for approximately 300 students from Manchester, Nashua and Salem; on October 30, Lakes Region Community College will host approximately 200 students from the surrounding area. VISTA has a database of over 20 college students interested in serving on a panel.

The second VISTA volunteer, who is serving at two Nashua colleges, Daniel Webster College and Rivier College for the current school year, is responsible for the following CACG outcomes:

- (1) Recruited 21 college students, who each volunteer 20 hours over the course of the semester with students enrolled in 21st Century after-school programs at five Nashua Title I Elementary schools. Students from the colleges aid K-5 students with homework and also create stimulating programs to enrich the children's education experience and to increase their college aspiration.
- (2) Replicate the Nashua 21st Century after-school program concept with other colleges who have VISTA volunteers. A meeting with 21st century school coordinators from around the state will be scheduled for May with the intent of lining up more 21st Century Extended Day Programs that can partner with area colleges to establish similar programs.
- (3) Piloted an "Athletes in Service" program whereby Rivier College student athletes adopted fourth and fifth grades at three elementary schools. Although athletes may not work one on one with every student in the class, the athletes have a presence in the classroom, wear their teams sports uniforms or college sweatshirts and the children are informed that these volunteers are coming from local college campuses. In this capacity, volunteers have served approximately 500 children. Each of the ten athletic teams at Rivier sends two athletes per week to a class for an hour (20 athletes per week serving 20 hours). Due to its success, the VISTA volunteer is piloting a similar program at Daniel Webster that will focus on second and third grades.

(4) University System of NH (USNH): Get Ready NH (GRNH)

Program Description

This program is in response to a request from the Governor Lynch for USNH, NH's 4-year public college and university system, to assist high schools both in decreasing the high school dropout rate and increasing the college-going rate. Since 2006, GRNH has been pairing eligible local high schools with area colleges in a college readiness program that is 'For students, by students'. Focusing on sophomores, college student 'street teams' interact with and engage high school students, typically in the lunchroom, with the aim of breaking down many perceived barriers to college, such as affordability, academic performance, and financial aid, to name a few. The messages conveyed by each of the street teams emphasize the program tagline- Go to College and Get Ahead. CACG funding was requested to support street team activities and to expand the program around the state. All Get Ready NH materials and programs are provided free of charge.

CACG activities and outcomes

For the 2008-09 school year, teams from Keene State College and Granite State College were added to serve Monadnock Regional High School and Kennett High School respectively. Combined with the original partnership between the University of New Hampshire and Spaulding High School, more than 20 team members have made 24 visits to the high schools with primary contact to 1,521 students and secondary contact to 3,743 students. Since the beginning of 2009, the USNH program coordinator has been working with the college coordinators and street team leaders on revising the curriculum that provides information about postsecondary education benefits, opportunities, planning, financial options, and preparation.

Additional activities included conducting a "pre-survey" to test student knowledge and attitude about college at Kennett HS and being part of a career night; funding 100 piggy banks to encourage saving for college at Monadnock HS; and ordering USDE "I'm Going to College"

materials. Before the end of this school year, the GRNH Coordinator will meet with all street team members to gather feedback about their experiences and recommendations for program changes.

Challenges and successes

A major challenge has been to identify the appropriate contacts beyond service learning coordinators and guidance counselors to increase support and participation in the program. Another has been to obtain “buy in” from teachers so that GRNH activities don’t conflict with classroom schedules.

The coordinator is well on the way to meeting the goal of serving eight high schools in the 2009-10 school year. She has made contact with twelve other colleges around the state, four of which are interested in recruiting street teams for the upcoming school year. In addition, one high school would like to participate and eligible high schools for each of the interested colleges have been identified and will be contacted.

(5) Postsecondary Education Commission (PEC): Workforce Incentive Program (WIP)

Program Description

The Workforce Incentive Program (WIP) was established by the NH Legislature in 2003 to increase the number of individuals in workforce shortage areas as determined by the NH Postsecondary Education Commission (PEC). The loan repayment component of WIP grants awards (for up to five years) to individuals who were teachers or nurses and who had outstanding student loans. The repayment is modeled after the Perkins Loan, repayments over a 5 year period beginning at 15 percent and increasing to 30 percent the final year, in order to encourage retention in the shortage area.

CACG Activities and Outcomes

The federal College Access Challenge Grant provided supplemental funding for additional WIP awards to 38 individuals for fiscal year 2009. These awards are disbursed on an annual basis, and the CACG awards ranged from \$184 to \$1,500 (average award was \$1,376) and totaled \$52,312. All recipients are first-time applicants and included 7 teachers and 31 nurses. PEC verifies outstanding educational loan obligations with their servicer.

Successes and Challenges

Motivated in part by the receipt of CACG funding and the need to perform a five-year program evaluation, PEC staff devised a two-fold strategy to:

- Undertake a file review in order to create a profile of the 38 CACG recipients and the remaining 220 who received awards between 2004 and 2009.
- Conduct an evaluation survey of recipients to primarily determine what influence, if any, loan repayment had on the recipient’s decision to pursue a career in a workforce shortage area, continue to work in the shortage area field, and to remain in New Hampshire. Of a potential 210 recipients for whom we had valid addresses, we received 78 responses (a 42 percent response rate).

The file review and survey were conducted in March and completed by early April. The results are being analyzed to determine:

- what additional information should be obtained on the application and what changes should be made to the PEC Web site program description.
- whether PEC should conduct an employer survey to obtain information about their experiences with WIP.
- the need to revisit the classification of shortage areas.
- how the debt burden of NH teachers and nurses compares to national level of burden.

Conclusion

Project Outcomes

Partner grantees that conduct outreach programs in schools will report on final number of students served in July. Because not all programs serve specific students and because many of these students will have not graduated by the end of the two-year CACG grant cycle, measurements of success for decreasing dropout rates and increasing postsecondary continuation rates may not be available.

Evaluation plans have either been completed or are in various stages of development. The Coordinator will continue to help grantees refine these over the course of the summer. A major focus will be on establishing key performance metrics to measure outcomes.

Ongoing Collaboration

Partners will continue to find ways of ensuring program collaboration at the high school level by making counselors aware of how their outreach efforts compliment other programs. They will also collaborate on training programs for guidance counselors, college students, and other personnel.

Project Impact

PEC staff and CACG program coordinators believe that the NH CACG grant will make a difference; not only to the extent they raise aspirations, academic rigor, and knowledge about the admissions and financial aid process, but to the extent that they pave the way for a more coordinated college access service delivery model for New Hampshire.

NORTH DAKOTA

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Executive Summary:

September, 2008

A press release issued by the Governor's office and North Dakota University System announced the North Dakota award under the College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) Program authorized by the United States Department of Education.

A copy of this press release or any other documents referenced in the following material can be provided to the U.S. Department of Education upon request.

October, 2008

The North Dakota University System (NDUS) hired Karen M. Paetz Sitting Crow as Director for the ND College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) Program. She attended the U.S. Department of Education Project Directors' meeting held in Washington, D.C. on October 28, 2008.

November/December, 2008

Networking began to establish the steering committee for the CACG Program. The first CACG Steering Committee meeting was held in Bismarck, North Dakota on December 16, 2008.

Invitations were sent to public, private, and tribal higher education organizations, as well as community non-profit agencies. In total, 21 invitees participated. The meeting consisted of a power point presentation describing the goals and objectives of the ND-CACG program. Those in attendance also participated in a focus group activity which collected information to guide future CACG planning.

January/February, 2009

Planning began on the development of the ND College Access Network logo and brochure for the NDUS-CACG Program. The ND-CACG Program Director participated in the North Dakota Marketplace for Entrepreneurs, held on January 14, 2009 at the Bismarck Civic Center.

Marketplace for Entrepreneurs is a significant annual event that promotes entrepreneurial outreach to North Dakotans of all ages. This venue provided the NDUS-CACG director with an opportunity to visit and disseminate information regarding the program, its goals and objectives, as well as network with other state agencies, schools, and colleges across North Dakota. The number of students visiting the ND-CAN booth was approximately 1000.

January activities included a partnership with the Bank of North Dakota in serving the College Goal Sunday event held on February 22, 2009 at 11 sites across North Dakota, which also included four tribally-controlled college sites. College Goal Sunday is a nationally recognized event with a purpose to provide application assistance for students and families in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). To promote student participation, the

NDUS-CAGC Program provided flip-cameras for student prize-drawings as a participation incentive at each of the 11 sites. Each student who registered for College Goal Sunday and filled out a student inventory/questionnaire had a chance to win the flip-camera in the drawing. As a result, the data and information collected from the student inventory/questionnaire will be shared between the Bank of North Dakota and NDUS-CAGC Program for evaluation and future planning. Approximately 384 students participated across the state. The Bank of North Dakota/Student Loans of North Dakota and ND-CACG are currently anticipating arrival of specific data and information from the National College Goal Sunday Organization.

The WICHE College Access Challenge Grant Network – Memorandum of Agreement was signed and submitted as of January 21, 2009.

Ms. Karen Paetz Sitting Crow resigned as ND-CACG Director to pursue other interests as of February 27, 2009.

March 2009

Mr. Erik M. Cutler was hired part-time as Interim Director of the ND-CACG to continue the ongoing work and activities of the program until a permanent Director could be hired on a full-time basis.

April 2009

Planning continued to organize the 2009 ND College Access Network Conference scheduled for May 12, 2009 in Bismarck, North Dakota.

Web site development for the ND College Access Network (ND-CAN) was implemented in collaboration with the Bank of North Dakota/Student Loans of North Dakota's College Planning Partnership. The website went "live" in late April and the address is www.nd-can.com

Other activities included community billboard development scheduled to display across North Dakota in ten locations starting in May and ending in July 2009. This billboard includes our network's logo, theme: ND-CAN "College within YOUR reach!," and Web site address: www.nd-can.com.

ND-CACG Interim Director, Erik Cutler and NDUS Vice Chancellor, Dr. Marsha Krotseng were invited to speak at the ND ASPIRE/TRIO annual meeting in Bismarck, ND. They shared information about the ND-CACG goals and held a discussion with audience participants. The organization's current President, Derek Sporbert, Assistant Director of TRIO at the University of North Dakota, shared his support for future partnership building and efforts in serving under-represented student populations in ND.

May 2009

The 2009 ND College Access Network Conference was held on May 12, 2009 and attracted 89 total participants. We were pleased with the number of participants for this initial year of the conference. The conference provided professional development and student informational sessions about various college access topics such as: college admissions and outreach efforts for underrepresented populations, financial aid information and scholarship resources, career and college planning, student support services, basic college preparation skill building, and various activities for students, parents, high school counselors, and community members. The session

topics were chosen specifically to provide college and career awareness information for students of low-income, underrepresented, and/or non-traditional backgrounds. A press release announcing the conference was sent to media representatives statewide, and coverage, including an interview with the keynote speaker, was provided by statewide public radio and in the press.

ND-CACG contracted with Bismarck State College's Continuing Education and Technical Instruction (CETI) department to organize the event. Conference marketing efforts included electronic mailing through ND state partnership listservs, brochure mailings, website announcements, public press-releases, tribal outreach, and community announcements. Presenters were chosen based upon the recommendations from the NDUS-CACG steering committee, Bismarck State College CETI conference planning coordinators, the Bank of North Dakota, and other major stakeholders.

Following the conference, a steering committee meeting was held to formally introduce committee members, discuss future membership planning, provide an update on the Annual Performance Report progress, and to discuss future plans for sustaining the ND College Access Network. Interim Director Erik Cutler also asked the committee to discuss the strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for future improvements of next year's conference. Many provided suggestions and agreed to meet in July for a summer steering committee meeting. Dr. Paul Bucci, ND-CACG's external evaluator, and Patrick Lane, Project Coordinator of WICHE - CACG Network, were also in attendance. Their attendance helped to provide valuable assistance for future planning and evaluation.

The position of College Access Challenge Program Director was readvertised in May, and plans are to fill the position with a full-time Director again by June.

Other:

The Interim Director, Erik Cutler and a partner-representative of the Bank of ND, Laura Entzel, attended the WICHE First Annual CACG Conference in April 2009. Registration, travel, and lodging paid for by WICHE.

Anticipated Activities – June through August 2009

- a) Conducting the "Adventures in Attitudes" train-the-trainer program to build and promote youth leadership and social-skills, conducted by Dr. James Davis, D.Ed. The program will be held in four regional areas of ND in partnership and collaboration with the tribal colleges in ND.
- b) Implementing an external evaluation of the grant with Dr. Paul T. Bucci, formerly of AED. Paul has agreed to serve as our evaluator and also attend our annual conference in May 2009 and our steering committee meeting in July of 2009. He will provide a final evaluation report on the first year's activities by July 31, 2009.
- c) Development of a formal strategic plan for sustaining the ND-College Access Network. The plan will include ND-CAN's vision, mission, and objectives to support our efforts to provide resources for college awareness and access, college

financing and opportunity information, and mentoring services for students of underrepresented backgrounds.

- d) Conducting a College Access Study of low-income and underrepresented student populations in ND. The study will identify demographics of low-income populations and identify their needs through a needs-assessment survey. This study will assist ND- CACG in identifying strategies and best practices in providing outreach and supporting college awareness, readiness, and access for low-income ND students and their families.
- e) Supporting ongoing development of the ND-CAN Web site in partnership with Student Loans of ND/Bank of ND. www.nd-can.com
- f) Conducting an assessment of the current ND-CACG Steering Committee membership and reorganizing the advisory structure to provide for more effective operation. The official steering committee will consist of 10-12 active participants. Participants will actively serve in developing the ND-CAN strategic plan and will develop a quality-focused role in providing steering efforts for the ND-CACG. We will continue to involve the additional 30-plus stakeholder members currently listed (along with other professionals) as a broader advisory group for the ND College Access Network (ND-CAN). They will receive communications, provide advice to steering committee members, participate in ND-CAN events, and help with outreach across the state.
- g) With this year's challenges and accomplishments, ND-CACG is well positioned to move forward and make rapid progress. We are in the process of starting our strategic planning and continuing our website development. We look forward to providing future outreach activities and events concerning college awareness and access for students and parents. We also look forward to providing professional development events for ND counselors, educators, and support service professionals in the areas of college access and mentorship.

NEW MEXICO

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Executive Summary:

Outcomes. The major outcome was the creation of the New Mexico College Access Network (NMCAN) which formalized an affiliation of college access programs. Using College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) funds, the New Mexico Higher Education Department (HED) hosted the first ever New Mexico College Access Summit during Governor Bill Richardson's Summit on Higher Education in New Mexico on October 7, 2008. The Summit served as a launch pad for the College Access Challenge Grant; it was the platform where HED could share the CACG goals and activities outlined for the two grant periods to come. Membership benefits include full administrative access to sharing the CarveYourPath.org Web site and access to a listserv.

Successes. The Summit was a huge success with 62 attendees representing 26 college access programs operating in the state. During the Summit, attendees agreed that NMCAN would not charge membership fees during the life of the CACG with the intention that NMCAN would define its membership rules over the first two years.

HED focus is also on ensuring sustainability of this program, this is the foundation of the partnerships between the state agencies and the private sector. Toward the end of sustainability, sub-grantee secured five regional affiliation agreements in support of the ESMS-CYP. The sustainability plan includes the private sector taking some ownership in the web portal project. The public and private sector's pooling of financial resources is a unique partnership with a common goal of providing college and career information to include the general public as well as students. The sustainability plan is designed to ensure the project's longevity and life beyond the CACG funding period.

Sub-grantee Successes. In addition to the NMCAN activities, sub-grantee CSN's secondary goal related to the CACG is the expansion of the College Bulletin. The College Bulletin is a 27 page publication filled with college and career information, college prep course information, financial aid, FAFSA tips, and brief articles on how to apply for college. The CACG goal was to expand its distribution to reach every middle and high school student. CSN utilized non-traditional distribution channels that resulted in significant cost-savings. CSN built a partnership with a local food bank that owns a fleet of delivery trucks making weekly deliveries to key regions in the state. The delivery trucks took bundles of the College Bulletins to each region where middle and high school counselors could pick up as many as needed. One hundred-twenty five thousand College Bulletins have been delivered to date with the remaining 20,000 to be sent by end of current academic year.

Challenges. The challenge was in the College Bulletin delivery from the local food bank to the middle and high schools without placing too much burden on the counselors. In New Mexico,

the counselor: student ratio is 450:1 so we want to alleviate any burden that our activities might create.

Goal 2: Design and develop a comprehensive college statewide Web portal with a supporting marketing campaign centralized around the Web portal.

Accomplishments. NMHED has made significant progress on its statewide Web portal, aka electronic student management system-Carve Your Path, (ESMS-CYP) by establishing partnerships with two state agencies and an established nonprofit. Project Partners include: the NM Department of Workforce Solutions, the NM Public Education Department and the College Success Network.

Concurrent to HED's awarding of the CACG, the state's K-12 education system, PED, had just been appropriated \$1.1 million by the state legislature to establish an electronic student portfolio. PED was early in their planning stage on their web portal project as was HED. PED's scope of work was focused on 11th grade assessments, while HED's scope was focused on all middle school students. The timing of the two web-based portal projects provided the opportunity for the two state agencies to join resources and come together as a unified project, multiplying our funding sources and preventing duplication of efforts.

The ESMS-CYP project is structured so each state agency is responsible for their respective modules within the portal i.e., PED owns and controls the K-12 sections, HED owns the college information section, DWS owns and controls the career information. Developers are designing the three modules to have seamless interconnectivity so the end-user's experience is rewarding. The ESMS-CYP project is outlined in a Multi-Agency Governance Agreement agreed upon by the three state agency Cabinet Secretaries.

The ESMS-CYP is the first project of its kind; a project that brings together state, federal and private resources. The ESMS-CYP project would not be possible without the assistance of the College Access Challenge Grant.

Marketing Campaign. Goal #2 includes a marketing campaign centralized around the web portal. The marketing campaign is shaped by the market research obtained through the focus groups held around the state in five regions. HED contracted with a market research firm, Research and Polling, Inc. to conduct a series of focus groups around the state. The research findings will be used to design the marketing campaign. Thus far, four regional focus groups out of the five scheduled are complete. The focus groups are being conducted with students between the grades of 7 – 10. The marketing research firm has divided New Mexico into five regions, in each region there are two focus groups, one for each gender. The focus groups questions are in relation to how they obtain information about college and career, what and who influences their decision to go to college, and if they ever considered dropping out of high school and what life factors are considered when thinking about their future.

Implementation of the Web portal. The portal has a phased rollout over the next eighteen months. The first rollout begins fall 2009, the second rollout is spring 2010 and the final rollout is Fall 2010. New Mexico is partnering with NM GEAR UP to use a portion of their GEAR UP schools as beta testing sites.

Challenges. A multi-agency project with this scope of work has not been done in New Mexico so the project managers have been navigating through uncharted territory with little precedent to draw from. The bureaucracy of state government has been a real challenge is setting up meetings with agency leadership to explain the project and gain their support. A second challenge also related to bureaucracy of state government is obtaining contracts established to conduct the market research.

Goal 3: Provide need-based scholarships to graduating high school seniors who demonstrated financial need as determined by the FAFSA.

Accomplishments. HED submitted a proposal to the Education Trust Board (ETB), the entity that oversees the state's 529 college savings plan, to request their new Oppenheimer Scholarship program be used by HED as the CACG matching dollars required. ETB named the Oppenheimer scholarship the Education Trust Board Pathways Scholarship and approved the funds to be used towards the CACG match requirement of \$279,000. HED was required to provide \$279,000 in matching dollars for each funding year. HED administered the ETB Pathways Scholarship beginning in fall 2009 to students who met the following criteria: New Mexico high school graduate, graduating high school GPA of 3.5, Estimated Family Contribution of \$0. To date, \$162,000 in scholarships has been awarded to 162 students. A second round of awards totaling \$117,000 will go out before August 14, 2009 to students beginning college in the fall semester.

Challenge. The CACG project period began just days before the fall 2009 college semester. The timing was tight and proved difficult for HED to notify students, their families and institutions about the new scholarship program available. Most students and institutions did not understand the criteria and how to apply so there was a learning curve to overcome in the first few months. The ETB Pathways Scholarship paper application is posted on the HED Scholarship Bulletin Board. Applications are going to be accepted through July 30, 2009 for the fall 2009 semester.

Goal 4: Increase the number of high school students who apply to community college and universities by 10 percent during the two year CACG award period and increase the number of students who attend College Goal Sunday and file the FAFSA by percent during the two year CACG award period

Accomplishments. HED adopted the Ticket to College model being utilized by one of our public two year institutions and presented it as a model for all the two year institutions to follow. The Ticket to College is an open enrollment initiative that requires partnership with the local feeder high schools. Two year institutions visit the high school campuses to visit with graduating seniors. During the visit, the two year institutions set students up with a student ID, explain the open enrollment policy. There are subsequent visits where the college staff hosts a FAFSA workshop for students and their families. At the high school graduation, the community college president is on stage presenting the senior with an "acceptance" letter that includes their student ID and how to come on campus to enroll in classes for the following semester. Enrollment data for fall 2009 will not be available until December 2009.

Added benefit to graduating high school seniors and recent General Education Development (GED) recipients: In New Mexico, recent graduates and GED recipients have

access to the Legislative Lottery Scholarship however in order to be eligible student must enroll full time the semester immediately following their high school or GED graduation.

Successes. HED sent the Ticket to College toolkit to all seventeen two-year postsecondary institutions; five institutions adopted the Ticket to College model and began implementation immediately. The feedback received from institutions that opted to wait a year for implementation was time constraints. We may see a significant increase in two-year postsecondary participation in the coming year.

Challenges. The primary obstacle was the creation of a student account within the school's student management system. This obstacle will be addressed through the Web portal which will offer student IDs to all public high school students through the electronic student management system.

NORTHERN MARIANAS COLLEGE

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Executive Summary:

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) project is currently administered and housed in Counseling Programs & Services (CPS) Department at the Northern Marianas College (NMC). The administrative capacity for CACG includes the Dean of COMPASS/CACG Director, Director of Counseling Programs & Services/CACG Manager, Dean of Student Services/CACG Administrative Manager, two CACG Outreach Counselors, and 10 CACG student ambassadors. A slight delay in implementing CACG objectives during the first few months of the award year was experienced but that did not deter the CACG staff from implementing the majority of action plans to support CACG approved goals and objectives.

In November 2008, the first student employees were hired and provided with training and tools to visit high schools and organize activities to assist high school juniors and seniors with college admission applications, general college planning and preparatory activities, and disseminating information on local and national financial aid programs. The first outreach counselor was hired soon after and was immediately tasked with developing and executing a financial aid workshop to promote awareness of college financial aid and resources, and to assist students and their parents with completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). “Unlock the Mysteries of Financial Aid” seminar was held in the Hibiscus Ballroom at Saipan’s Fiesta Resort with approximately 285 students and community members in attendance. Of the 187 participants that completed an event evaluation form that evening, 75 percent reported being either very satisfied or satisfied with the information presented regarding financial aid, scholarships and grants. Furthermore, 72 percent from that same group reported being either very satisfied or satisfied with the FAFSA workshop during the event. These indicators surpassed the CNMI CACG’s proposed success criteria and provided CACG staff and partners with an important, early indicator of its effectiveness in carrying out its mission, goals, and objectives.

CACG recruited 153 high school juniors, seniors and first-year college students from low-income households, primarily Pacific Islanders, to affiliate with the program since hosting its first financial aid event. At this rate, CACG’s goal of recruiting 200 eligible students to participate in the program should be achieved by the end of the first award year. Students who are eligible to affiliate with CACG receive intensive, one-on-one academic and personal counseling, academic tutoring, access to financial aid awards, and access to CACG and other NMC-sponsored events and activities for students. The CACG outreach counselors are charged with monitoring the academic progress of affiliated students and provide assistance and referrals to each as appropriate in support of their transition to higher education and success through their first-year of college.

In addition to providing services to CACG affiliates, CACG staff support, coordinate, and/or facilitate college information sessions, college admission workshops, financial aid workshops, and other college preparatory activities for the CNMI community. In the past five months, these events were attended by more than 2,000 high school and first-year college students, their families and members of the community-at-large on the island of Saipan alone. Plans are in progress for CACG staff, NMC Admissions and Financial Staff, and community partners to travel to the islands of Rota and Tinian and conduct similar events so that students from the high schools and their parents may be accessed important information about the college, financial aid, etc.

Some of the major events already conducted include the NMC Information Sessions scheduled on November 20, 2008 and again on January 5, 2009, Unlock the Mysteries of Financial Aid, College Start Smart Seminars for all public high school seniors, the NMC Career Fair, the NMC Counselors' Conference, and participation in community events related to youth development such as the Flame Tree Festival, the Micronesian Youth Service Network Regional Conference, and the Annual Youth Development Summit. In attendance and also participating in these events were also representatives of the majority of CACG community partners and service providers as listed in the approved grant application.

During the Spring 2009 semester, CACG distributed 59 need-based scholarship awards to high school juniors, seniors and first-year college students. 13 awards were provided to high school students who demonstrated eligibility for early admission to NMC and who also qualified for the free or reduced meal program at their respective schools, a key indicator of low-income status for CACG. The remaining scholarship awards were distributed among 46 first-year students at NMC who were temporarily on suspension from receiving a Pell grant or who were currently receiving a Pell grant, had an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of "0" and, were among FAFSA applicants who reported the lowest household income levels. The number of individuals who received a financial grant or need-based scholarship exceeded CACG's goal by 96 percent during the first award year. The retention rate of these students will be monitored and measured against stated success criteria during the upcoming school year.

NEVADA

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Executive Summary:

Nevada faces unique challenges in raising the state's level of college awareness and participation. Recent studies have shown that while the number of jobs requiring some form of postsecondary education in the state is expected to rise, Nevada consistently ranks near the bottom in college access and attainment. Far too many state residents lack basic knowledge about the college preparation process, not to mention the different types of support available to students and their families. In an effort to increase college awareness and participation in the state, the Nevada P-16 Advisory Council partnered with the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) to expand and further implement NSHE's "Go To College" program. The centerpiece of Nevada's CACG plan is a public information campaign designed to foster a college-going culture in the state, while at the same time communicating college and workforce readiness expectations. The campaign's core message is that college is a necessary and attainable goal for all students. Target audiences for the campaign include students in the third, sixth, and eighth grades in low-income schools; high school students either applying for college/financial assistance or preparing to enter the workforce; and every student and parent/guardian in the state who shares the goal of fostering a college-going culture. The ultimate goal of the Nevada's "Go to College" program is to increase the number of Nevada students who complete high school and enroll in some form of postsecondary education. After reviewing Nevada's original grant goals and outcomes in February of this year, the P-16 Advisory Council agreed that some revisions were necessary in order to increase the project's chances of success. One of the key revisions was to expand the three regional "counselor training institutes" included in the original grant into three regional CACG meetings where counselors, teachers, policymakers, and other stakeholders from across the state could share information and best practices about college access efforts. This revision, and the other minor changes to Nevada's grant, is explained in greater detail in Section II of this report. During the initial grant reporting period, the following activities have been undertaken or completed:

- Under the guidance of the P-16 Advisory Council, NSHE identified a strategy for increased distribution of "The College Journey" informational brochure to schools, counselors, students, and parents across the state. Additional brochures have been printed and will continue to reach a wider audience as the grant moves forward.
- GEAR UP data from 2006-2007 were collected to measure college attitudes and awareness among Nevada students and their parents. This baseline data will be compared with future GEAR UP data when it becomes available to see if Nevada's public information campaign had a positive effect on college awareness levels.

- As part of the effort to recruit classroom speakers, NSHE developed a CACG FAQ sheet and a speaker invitation form to distribute to business leaders and postsecondary professionals across the state, encouraging them to participate in Nevada's "Go To College" information campaign. Classroom speakers will stress the importance of college and workforce readiness to students in the third, sixth, and eighth grades. It is anticipated that some classroom visits will take place before the end of the 2008-2009 school year in June.
- Planning of the first regional meeting of teachers, counselors, and policymakers has begun. Reno, Elko and Las Vegas were selected as the sites of the first network meetings in order to bring stakeholders from northern and southern Nevada together to exchange ideas and best practices regarding college access efforts across the state. It is hoped that these meetings will lead to a sustainable statewide college access network that will continue after the grant period ends.
- As part of the larger public information campaign being overseen by the P-16 Advisory Council, NSHE, with the assistance of WICHE, procured the services of KPS|3, a local advertising agency located in Reno, to create and conduct a marketing campaign aimed at increasing college awareness in the state. In addition to creating a "Go To College" Web site which will serve as the campaign's focal point, KPS|3 will develop two television spots aimed at low-income students and their parents, create a Facebook network page and run targeted Facebook ads, and design a tri-fold "Go To College" brochure which will be widely distributed across the state. The bulk of KPS|3's marketing activities will take place from August through November of 2009.

The greatest challenge towards reaching the goals of Nevada's CACG project has been one of geography. Nevada has three distinct regions – Clark County in the south, Washoe County in the north, and several rural counties spread across the state. Trying to coordinate efforts between these three areas has proved somewhat problematic, but hopefully the three regional CACG meetings described above will allow groups in these different areas of the state to better coordinate college access efforts in the future. There are also plans to hire another CACG employee who has past experience working with all Nevada school districts. This person will coordinate efforts statewide to support Michele Dewey, the current project director who is located in Las Vegas. Nevada's primary progress during the first reporting period has been the planning and coordination of its CACG activities. Now that the planning process is nearly complete, the bulk of the "Go To College" information campaign can commence. With classroom speakers being lined up to visit low-income schools during the summer months of 2009 and the development of a multimedia advertising campaign already underway, the remainder of the project year promises to be a busy and successful time for Nevada's "Go To College" program.

NEW YORK

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Executive Summary:

The overall goal of New York State's CACGP is to increase the rate of low-income, minority, and underserved students prepared to apply for, and succeed in college, with a priority on below-poverty-level families.

The New York State Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) is New York State's lead agency for the federal College Access Challenge Grant Program (CACGP). HESC is achieving the program goal by directly providing critical services and activities and services, and by working with a confederation of organizations – schools, colleges, community-based organizations (CBOs), education agencies, faith-based organizations – that share the work of bringing high-need students to education success. HESC has identified, coordinated, encouraged, and enriched the established activities of these organizations, and initiated new support that furthers the CACGP goals. The CACGP initiative is being coordinated within New York's larger statewide effort to meet P-16 achievement goals established in legislation, extant within State and local education partnerships, and recommended by the Governor's Commission on Higher Education.

HESC's CACG efforts are increasing the ability of targeted high-need students, beginning in middle school, to take advantage of college and career planning opportunities, prepare for and achieve academic success, and take the necessary steps for successful college admission and financial aid application. During the first year of its CACGP program, HESC has initiated two different types of services: direct activities performed by the agency, and activities conducted by other organizations that are funded by HESC.

Direct HESC activities have included:

- Providing information to target-population students and families, including the benefits of going to college, college opportunities, college financing, and career preparation, and provided outreach activities for students at risk of not enrolling or completing postsecondary education. These activities have met the program objectives of: increasing target students' and families' knowledge of the benefits of education; reinforcing student goals for high school success; increasing student and parent understanding of actual college cost and college affordability; and increasing the rate of on-line filing of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and New York State financial aid application by high-need students.
- Initiating expanded professional development directed toward those school counselors, education counselors at community-based organizations (CBOs), college financial aid administrators and others that serve the highest-need students. This helps targeted students by

building up the capacity of front-line providers who are best able to meet their needs: school counselors, teachers, college financial aid administrators and admissions reps, and education counselors of community and foster care organizations. HESC has coordinated and conducted professional development opportunities for these counselors - workshops, seminars, and training

- in targeted school districts, community settings, and through the state professional associations.

In addition to the Direct, agency initiatives, HESC sub-contracted with other agencies, organizations, and institutions:

- Creating a number of School-College-Community Organization partnerships through its sub-grant competitive RFP processes. The sub-grant RFP's encouraged bidding organizations to create or expand imaginative, new ways to construct successful secondary-to-postsecondary bridges for the highest-need students. Schools, their partner colleges, and other support organizations were encouraged to increase college-going rates by exploring inter-institutional activities that would motivate and serve the educational needs of at-risk students and their families.

- In order to meet CACGP goals and objectives in specified geographic areas, HESC has contracted to provide targeted support to local schools, agencies, and community-based organizations for specific products, services, and activities that they provided to high-need students and families. Project funding has been conditioned on the outcomes being measurable and verifiable to ensure coordination with the overall state program.

Finally, HESC has begun to create a statewide public college access and success campaign directed at CACGP-eligible students and their families – the New York College Access Network (NYCAN). Designed to reinforce and support college access activities in communities throughout the state, this public education campaign will support the grant-supported local activities by creating a Web-site base for administration of access and support programs and information; utilizing public service ads in multiple, targeted media outlets such as municipal transit systems (subways and buses), radio spots on stations serving designated audiences, and electronic, social media.

OHIO

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Executive Summary:

Implementation has occurred with minimal challenges as the Ohio Board of Regents is simply supplementing an existing need-based grant program with funds from the College Access Challenge and Grant (CACG) Program.

During the 2008-2009 academic year, Ohio College Opportunity Grant Program has provided need-based financial aid assistance to 73,736 students, 48.1 percent of whom fall below the federal poverty level.

In helping to support need-based grant program, the CACG funds have been instrumental in helping to reach our lofty enrollment growth goals over the course of the next ten years.

Additional financial aid to this pool of recipients has also helped to support our efforts toward making higher education more affordable for more students.

OKLAHOMA

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Executive Summary:

In Oklahoma, CACGP funds are being used to expand existing initiatives to increase the number of students from underrepresented groups who are enrolled, retained and complete degrees. The activities are: (1) scholarships to Pell-eligible students as an incentive to complete a baccalaureate degree; (2) professional development for high school counselors to expand use of the student information portal (OKcollegestart.org) as an information and outreach tool; (3) outreach toolkit for colleges to retain and graduate students taking courses at technology centers; (4) outreach to parents and students to increase use of an academic preparation using ACT's Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS); (5) professional development for inexperienced high school counselors in all high schools and all counselors in high poverty school districts; and (6) consultants for colleges to improve success of students.

(1) Guidelines for distributing scholarship funds to Pell-eligible students were created and distributed to all public and private Oklahoma higher education institutions awarding baccalaureate programs. The awards were made to 366 students confirmed with at least 50 more being processed for spring 2009. Once Pell-eligibility was established, financial aid directors identified target students who have prolonged their college education due to financial need. Financial aid directors report that many of their students would have struggled significantly without these scholarship funds and that these funds were made available just in time for some students who otherwise would not have stayed on track to graduate due to financial hardship. Upon tracking these students, there will be a significantly higher percentage complete their degrees than found in the general population of similar students.

(2) A field-based Coordinator has provided effective professional development for middle school and high school counselors, resulting in increased use of the student information portal (OKcollegestart.org) by counselors and students, especially in utilization of upgrades that facilitate application to college and financial aid. More than 57 high schools have been visited and more than 129 counselors trained to use the portal. More than 150 high schools have agreed to participate in the Transcript Exchange System. These high schools represent 32 percent of all of the high schools in the state. New student accounts are up 57 percent from last year with more students accessing financial aid resources. Online applications through OKcollegestart.org for Oklahoma's Promise scholarship for families with an income below \$50,000 are up 36 percent from last year.

(3) Cooperative Alliances between colleges and technology centers reach students statewide who would not usually consider pursuing college degrees. However, these students are earning credit from the colleges while taking courses taught at district technology centers. Oklahoma higher education is developing a "campus tool kit" designed to reach out to students attending

technology centers and encourage them to complete a college degree. The tool kit will consist of a “best practices” publication for institutions to consult when developing their promotion activities and various related materials that they can customize for local use. These items will include brochures, display ad templates, congratulation certificates, posters, and enhanced web content. The challenge has been finding out why students earn the technical credit, but never complete the degree. An advisory board has been formed and a consultant to run focus groups of students and parents has been hired.

(4) Based on previous research, it was found that some Oklahoma parents do not receive the EPAS college and career preparation materials that are delivered to the schools. Outreach has begun that involves a mail-based, direct marketing campaign for parents of students who participate in the Oklahoma EPAS. One of four separate mailings (May 2009 to 8th graders, August 2009 to 9th graders, July 2010 and 2011 to 10th graders) are being distributed with several key messages: these assessments provide individualized college preparation information; good preparation contributes to college success; individual assistance is available to middle or high school and students; ACT test preparation and other college planning information is available at OKcollegestart.org; and how to apply for financial aid. More than 54,700 households will be reached this year.

(5) More than 95 counselors have already attended 12 of 15 professional development retreats. One retreat was cancelled due to ice and snow which has been rescheduled. The format of the retreats includes responding to questions, leading discussion and training on tools available to middle and high school counselors for preparing students for college: EPAS, OKcollegestart.org, and College & Career Planner. The initial feedback has been very positive and a formal evaluation upon completion of all retreats is planned. Counselors have reported that this is one of the best in-service activities. They particularly value the sharing of ideas, the opportunity to interact with other counselors and learning how to use and promote EPAS, OKcollegestart.org, and college scholarships.

(6) Three community colleges are currently implementing data-driven plans to improve retention of students from underrepresented groups and close the gap between their success in college and other groups. The planned retention activities address remediation, first-year persistence and financial aid. The colleges have identified groups of students who have not succeeded in developmental courses particularly mathematics and first-year, gateway courses such as English composition, chemistry, accounting, history and algebra. Financial aid issues such as getting students to apply for assistance and covering costs of textbooks have been addressed. New strategies for improving the course pass rates and getting students more financial aid will be implemented and measured with the assistance of two national consultants supported by the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas-Austin and the American Association of Community Colleges.

OREGON

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Executive Summary:

Oregon's CACGP has made very good progress since it was initiated in fall 2008. Oregon may be unique in some regards, as all of the 3 major components of our CACGP are new programs which have required a planning and start up period of several months. Major program components are: (1) Adult Learner Resource Line (telephone) and Website; (2) Financial Aid and College Opportunity awareness through a targeted, statewide advertising and outreach initiative; and (3) Train-the-Trainer financial aid counselor effort. The Oregon CACGP is also a collaborative of three key state agencies – the Oregon University System (OUS), the Oregon Community Colleges and Workforce Development Agency (OCCWD), and the Oregon Student Assistance Commission (OSAC) – and not an add-on to the existing work of any one agency. The Governor's Office has also been actively involved in the development of the program components within Oregon's CACGP.

The first period of the CACGP – from fall 2008 to winter 2009 – was spent in organizing a Core Management Team and Sub-Teams to plan, develop, and implement the program initiatives, and to begin launching the programs. These teams are made up of college, university and OSAC academic, financial aid, admissions, counseling, communications and advocacy staff, as well as K-12 counselors and outreach staff, and staff from other state agencies, such as the Departments of Human Services and of Labor and Employment. All team members are volunteers, except for one half-time staff person who began working on January 26, 2009 as the CACGP Coordinator (Stedman Burroughs), and the part-time, CACGP-funded Adult Resource Line counselors who began working on April 6, 2009, and who are paid with CACGP grant funds. Lead staff persons, including Joe Holliday (Project Director), Diane Saunders (Co-Project Director), David McDonald of Western Oregon University (Team leader of Marketing and Outreach), Vicki Merkel of OSAC (Team leader of the Counselor and Training Team), and Larry Cheyne of OCCWD (Team leader of the Resource Line and Campus Liaison Team) have worked the management and oversight of the project into their current positions at their respective organizations (see attached roster).

(1) **Status of the Adult Learner Resource Line:** Development and implementation work was fairly extensive as this is a new effort for the State. Implementation work completed includes recruiting an OUS campus, Portland State University, to be the Resource Line host site, and also exploring with Portland Community College as a potential second site for 2010; working with Oregon State University and PSU telecoms staff to determine the technical and logistical components of the Resource Line, and to get this set up and launched; developing and executing the contract with PSU to define their responsibilities as the host site, purchasing equipment, and setting up the Resource Line office; developing the Resource Line Guide for counselor-operators, and Web-based call tracking forms used in the assessment and evaluation

processes; providing comprehensive training to the resource line counselor-operators; developing radio ad copy to create awareness that the Adult Learner Line is available to help Oregonians; the launch of the Resource Line (week of 4-20-09); launching the radio ads (week of 4-27-09); the development of the complementary Resource Line website, which is still under development and will be launched in mid-May 2009, and included hiring a Web designer and developer to create a logo and Web style sheets, developing the content mapping for the site, and determining how it will fit into the existing OSAC Web site (although it has a unique URL), which is the key financial aid Web site for the State of Oregon and has a high level of recognition.

(2) **Status of the Advertising/Outreach Effort:** Two different advertising/outreach campaigns have already been launched. The first is both television and radio ads which inform the public that college is an option and that state and federal financial aid are available, and where to get more information; these ads began running in March 2009, and were done in collaboration with the Oregon Broadcasters Association, the majority of air time provided pro-bono and the state paying for the rest as part of the CACGP match (for example, the state paid for \$22,000 in air time and received another \$126,440 in free air time, for a total of 4,046 ads run statewide between February and April 2009). These ads will continue to be aired as part of the CACGP, with some voiceover and visual changes over the next two years. The second set of ads are radio only, and specifically inform the public about the Adult Learner Resource Line, and will run between late April 2009 and at intervals over the next two years. Collateral materials are also in development – including brochures and posters in both English and Spanish (with possible translation into Russian as well) – and will be ready for distribution by July 2009 to schools, colleges, and through other state agencies.

(3) **Status of the Train-the-Trainer financial aid counselor effort:** This component is still in the development stages, with Core Team and sub-team members determining target groups to involve in training, optimal delivery methods (e.g., in-person, Web-streaming, etc.), and target communities in which to deliver the training based on current gaps in those communities. The Counselor/Training Task Team thus far has identified existing training programs and materials aligned with grant objectives, including the National Training for Counselors and Mentors module and statewide initiatives of the Oregon Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. The planning stage of this component will be completed in June 2009, with implementation of training beginning in September 2009.

(4) **Other grant-wide** work completed includes interviewing and hiring of an outside evaluator who can work with the CACGP from beginning to end to help determine the most effective ways to collect and assess data and determine outcomes. Information dissemination on the CACGP has also been provided to admissions, financial aid and guidance counselor professionals across the state through in-person, electronic, and other mediums so that they can also be advocates for the goals and outcomes of Oregon's CACGP, and help disseminate information about the CACGP components to students.

In terms of **major outcomes, successes, and challenges**, these have included development of the CACGP as a statewide effort involving several agencies and many professionals in numerous fields of expertise across three different and major efforts, all developed from the ground up, which involved a great deal of planning and coordination. This has also been a challenge given that the Project Director, Co-Director and other Team members are non-

federally-compensated staff and working very diligently to ensure that the outcomes of the CACGP are achieved. To have started from ground zero and now to have the Adult Learner Resource Line up and running, with hired and trained staff and newly developed resource materials and Web site, is a major accomplishment. The first round of ads related to college options and financial aid have also been a great success, helping to spur increased enrollment in Oregon's colleges and universities, and providing hope, opportunity and options to many who are now considering the need for more postsecondary education in the current economic climate; Oregon has the second highest unemployment rate in the nation as of April 2009, at over 12 percent, with many communities experiencing rates much higher than this.

PENNSYLVANIA

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Executive Summary:

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) in partnership with Project GRAD USA (GRAD) and the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) is delivering coordinated, intensive services to 16,629 students in seven low-income and below-proficient high schools and their feeder middle schools while also providing financial aid information to the entire state in a coordinated fashion under the College Access Grant Program (CACG).

The Pennsylvania College Access Challenge Grant Program (PA CACG) has provided a unique opportunity to form a partnership to impact the academic lives of over 16,000 at-risk students across Pennsylvania. The partnership includes the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), Project GRAD (GRAD) and the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA). Through PA CACG, this project is laying the ground work for a sustainable, State-level initiative supported through a diverse public-private partnership.

The PA CACG was launched in August 2008 with a series of buy-in meetings with partner districts across Pennsylvania. These meetings established the foundation to be able to launch PA CACG school-based services. Each targeted school district participated in an assessment and planning process led by GRAD, PHEAA, and school district staff. At the same time, GRAD spearheaded the hiring, screening, and training process of the PA CACG staff, including the hiring of the Associate Vice President of Program, PA CACG State Director, Data Analyst, and school-based Pennsylvania staff including College Access Campus Coordinators and Academic Coaches. Professional development efforts included a three day PA CACG staff training that culminated in the development of a ten day campus plan that launched the implementation of PA CACG services at each campus. Other instrumental features of the training included trainings from PHEAA and PDE as well as presentations from Congressman Chaka Fattah and Senator Vincent Hughes who expressed the importance of improving achievement gaps for underrepresented students.

An additional training for the Academic Consultants was held in mid-February 2009 to codify a comprehensive approach in implementing the academic support in literacy and mathematics in the seven high schools based upon the collected student data (inclusive of Pennsylvania State System Assessment level (PSSA) sub-score data, four-site tests scores (where available) and student grades in literacy and mathematics). The target population includes 9th grade students who performed at a Pennsylvania State System Assessment level (PSSA) of “basic” or below in math and literacy and presently have below a “C” in both subjects. GRAD’s academic support in literacy and mathematics provides students more time on-task, individualized academic support, and aids students in achieving a proficiency in mathematics and literacy in preparation to take core college preparatory courses.

GRAD worked with each high school to establish a College Access Center that has provided the infrastructure to deliver school-based college access services to the target population. Each center is equipped with college access resources and operated by the College Access Campus Coordinator. As of April 2009, PA CACG has provided over 3984 direct services to 1,988 students across the seven high schools and feeder middle schools. Through the PHEAA partnership, PHEAA has assisted GRAD in presenting 63 financial aid workshops, events, and providing financial aid materials to 250 parents and students. In addition, PHEAA is collaborating with GRAD to present EdPlanner to counselors and students statewide, including the seven high schools and their feeder middle schools.

This grant year GRAD will expand the PA CACG services into the summer by offering rising 9th grade students who are performing two or more years below grade level an opportunity to participate in GRAD's one-week Summer Bridge program encompassing the following: (1) Career Awareness; (2) Test Taking Skills; (3) Mathematics and Literacy; (4) Increasing Self-Esteem; and (5) College Tours. Additionally, in collaboration with PHEAA and a local college or university, GRAD will offer rising 12th grade students and their parents the opportunity to attend a College Access Forum designed to prepare and support students and parents in pursuing a postsecondary education.

In summary, PA CACG has built the necessary school-based infrastructure to be able to fulfill the grant goals and objectives by the end of the grant period in August 13, 2009. Key accomplishments include hiring key staff, securing buy-in and building strong relationships with partner districts, establishing College Access Centers at each of the targeted high schools, implementing PA CACG program strategies in partnership with PHEAA and PDE, and serving the needs of the targeted students and their parents. In addition, GRAD will be able to serve students during the summer months with extended college access activities like the Summer Bridge and College Access Forums. Finally, PHEAA provided financial aid services across the state as reflected in the matching funds section of the report.

PUERTO RICO

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Executive Summary:

As part of the College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) Program our aim is to enhance the possibility of underrepresented groups to access to post secondary education. In Puerto Rico, the access challenge is one of disparate pre-college (K-12) academic opportunities among socioeconomically disadvantaged students, most of which go to public schools. Understanding that the challenge is driven by the complex interplay of both cultural and structural issues, the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) has partnered with the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE) via the creation of the *Puerto Rico K-16 Council*. The activities and services proposed in this CACG award application represent the first UPR-PRDE joint effort to address the access challenge in Puerto Rico.

We have been developing all our components according to our plan, although with some delay due to two major factors. The first one was the advent of a new administration at the PRDE after the November, 2008 election. In Puerto Rico this implies a change in most Program Directors at the PRDE. So we have had to explain and motivate the new administration with the project. Given this situation, it has taken us longer to build the teams. A second factor that has delayed the project is that the development of the financial and administrative infrastructure has taken longer that what we expected. For these reasons we will request for a third year no cost extension. The timelines of the various components of the project will be attuned to the new time extension, and the rate of spending will be proportionally adjusted.

Our major accomplishment has been the successfully administered, free of charge and during an academic workday, to all public school 12th grade students of the College Board Entrance Examination on September 30, 2008. A total of 29,183 students participated, 26,761 of which were regular administrations and 2,422 required special accommodations. This represents a 35 percent increase over the number of students who participated in the regular administration of the test in 2007.

The CACG Director has met with College Board officials to delineate the data assessment plan. Initial results indicate that even though the sample size increased significantly, the overall public school average in verbal and mathematics reasoning scores remained fairly stable. More importantly, the number of students with more than a 550 score, the average score for admission at UPR, in each of the verbal and mathematics reasoning portions of the exam increased by 30 percent and 50 percent, respectively. The CACG staff will continue working with College Board officials to gain a better understanding of the results and identify areas of opportunity to improve postsecondary access to these students. These results have already served us as a motivation

strategy among teachers and school personnel to promote their interest in presenting to their students, of all economic backgrounds, the possibility of university studies.

The University of Puerto Rico followed the administration of the College Board Entrance Examination with a well-articulated promotional campaign that included over 400 university students visiting public schools to present students with information on academic programs and admission processes and well as the admissions application forms, a newspaper and radio campaign designed by public communication students of UPR-Río Piedras, a UPR Open House Day where all UPR campuses were open to high school students, and significant web presence including Facebook and MySpace sites¹. Eight thousand-nine hundred-fifty five (8,955) students from three hundred sixty seven schools (367, 139 public and 228 private) assisted in the activity.

As we plan an activity following the College Goal Sunday model with financial aid experts and college students that help students complete their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) we decided that a pilot project should be developed to learn how to transfer these ideas to our reality. On the last two weeks of April and the first week of May, we developed the pilot project in four of the UPR System campuses: UPR Río Piedras, UPR Mayagüez, UPR Cayey, and UPR Ponce, with a participation of 59 schools. Based on what we learned we will scale up next year to 100 schools and in our third year we will touch all our high schools (approximately 200).

Our Stem Outreach has been active in developing activities in the schools. Sixteen science shows were offered in the schools, impacting a total of 4,416 students and 131 teachers. Thirty four middle and high schools were visited by university students for the Cyber Space Learning activity, in which a total of 856 high school students and 36 teachers participated. Three workshops for teachers were offered.

As we work directly with students, we are also building systemic capacity for future scalable “access” interventions in these communities far beyond the CACGP funding period. We are developing an age-appropriate Internet portal that will provide information on postsecondary education benefits, opportunities, career planning, and financial aid requirements and availability. Information will also be structured according to target population: students, parents, counselors, teachers, and school administrators. Interactive tools and games will help guide users through various components of the portal. The portal will provide links to the online end-products associated with other CACG proposed activities and will serve as the basis of the counselor training activities. The plan for the Portal has been designed and the plan has been presented to teachers, counselors, superintendents and students for their feedback. Based on their feedback a development group will work on programming the Portal. The final version will be ready for the Fall Semester 2009. As printed companion to the Portal a “Personal Roadmap to College” Kit will be developed. The contract for the team that is to develop the Portal is already written up and it is under the evaluation of the UPR legal counsel office.

1 The PRDE and UPR signed an agreement to link the student information systems. In January 2009, the PRDE provided UPR with the first such data file including information on all current public school high school students. We have identified a consultant firm with ample experience in IT projects and with the PRDE and UPR systems, and provided them with an overview of the project. They responded with a formal consulting proposal to fulfill the project management role as it pertains to this component of the CACG. At the moment we are processing the contract at the UPR legal assistance office.

RHODE ISLAND

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Executive Summary:

As of the time of this report, the **Rhode Island Higher Education Assistance Authority (RIHEAA)** has disbursed 66 percent of the federal funds received for those students whose postsecondary institutions have certified them as enrolled and eligible. Although the entire \$330,000 was offered as \$1,000 to needy-students meeting the poverty-based guidelines, many of those students never showed up for class at the institutions listed on their Free Applications for Federal Student Aid (FAFSAs). At the end of the academic year, RIHEAA will use any remaining funds to make award offers to as many of those students who continue to show the same eligibility for 2009-2010 as that funding will permit.

RIHEAA has also implemented and advertised an online Web portal – www.WaytoGoRI.org - to great success. The portal is designed to provide early awareness to students as young as kindergarten to the importance of higher education and choosing the right future career path. In addition to the 28,432 students that have set up user accounts in the system, high school and middle school guidance counselors have made extensive use of the portal.

The **College Planning Center of Rhode Island (CPCRI)** has met with thousands of students and their families, providing free counseling and assistance in completing FAFSAs, explaining the college admissions process, and further explaining the financial aid process. The staff of the CPCRI also provide free assistance in completing the College Board's Profile form for those students attending institutions whose financial aid office requires it. Surveys were conducted among those receiving the services of the CPCRI, the results indicating a greater understanding by those participating on the subjects of education financing options, financial responsibility, selecting colleges that are the right fit, college admission requirements, the financial aid process, and writing college essays.

The **Rhode Island Office of Higher Education (RIOHE)** has conducted numerous "Preparing for College" presentations at middle and high schools throughout Rhode Island, reaching an attendance of 1,450 students. In addition, RIOHE organized a college fair specially aimed at low-income urban students. Approximately 100 people attended the fair, which featured participation from ten of the eleven institutions of higher education in our state, as well as the Navy and Coast Guard. Another similar fair is scheduled for this June in a different low-income, urban area of the state.

SOUTH CAROLINA

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Executive Summary:

The College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) Program is providing a grassroots community based program throughout the state of South Carolina based on the belief that college success is possible for students who prepare academically and graduate from high school. The CACG program has been working to implement all activities described in the original grant application. At this time, all activities are either completed or in the process of completion.

The CACG has completed the expansion of the *College Goal Sunday* format to provide a grassroots intervention by local postsecondary institutions in the 12 Regional Areas across the state. Over 900 students and their families were provided financial aid information and support. CACG has completed the process of choosing a public relations firm to provide the advertising campaign to highlight the accessibility and affordability of postsecondary education in South Carolina. The chosen public relations firm will develop an extensive resource manual that describes all resources, activities, courses, and other applicable support available to guidance counselors across the state as well.

A nomination and application process has been completed to choose three Guidance Counselor of the Year Awards. The award process was part of a collaboration with the South Carolina Department of Education. The Higher Education Awareness Readiness Transition (HEART) Award for a high school, a middle school and an elementary school guidance counselor has been chosen and the award dinner is scheduled for May 19, 2009.

The College Access Conference to disseminate information and provide training for all college access stakeholders in the state of South Carolina is planned to occur in fall of 2009. CACG funding has been used to enhance the activities of the state's 12 Regional Education Centers (RECs) by providing additional support focused on data and resources for guidance counselors across the state. The Regional Education Centers have enhanced their websites utility and are now tracking usage to ensure they are meeting the needs of their respective regions.

The RECs have recruited high profile individuals from the state of South Carolina, such as athletes, entertainers, legislators, and community leaders, who have successfully completed (or are in the process of completing) postsecondary education to speak and mentor low-income students across the state. These on-site speakers have begun presenting in the schools and more will continue through the entire grant implementation.

The two television series that will be provided through collaboration with South Carolina Educational Television (SCETV) are in development and will be aired on SCETV in the summer of 2009. The first show will be a series on student access and attainment of postsecondary

education. Parents and students will be able to gather information from any individual show or the entire series on the affordability, academic preparation, and availability of postsecondary education. The second show will provide a series of programs designed to educate guidance counselors on postsecondary advisement.

Overall, the South Carolina CACG program is pleased with the current status and progress for the implementation of the grant. Much of our success comes from our strong collaborations with existing state programs. From the beginning of planning through the process of implementation, the College Access Challenge Grant program has worked with other college access programs. The CACG Project Director's office is physically located next door to the Project Director for South Carolina GEAR UP and many aspects of the CACG program have been implemented with the input and guidance of the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education and the SC GEAR UP program. As well, the CACG program has worked with the University of South Carolina's TRIO programs, College Goal Sunday, and the South Carolina department of Social Services' Foster Care Division to promote college access throughout the state.

SOUTH DAKOTA

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Executive Summary:

Please provide a brief description (1-2 pages) of the current status of your project. Describe the extent to which you have implemented all program activities and components planned for this reporting period. Highlight your major outcomes, successes, and challenges.

The South Dakota College Access Challenge grant program (SDCAC) strives to meet two goals: (1) Increase students' and parents' knowledge of postsecondary education options, preparation, and financing; and (2) Increase the number of students who enroll in postsecondary education within one year of high school graduation.

The Governor of South Dakota, Mr. Michael Rounds, has designated the South Dakota Department of Education's Office of Indian Education as the agency responsible for administering the SDCAC program. Mr. Keith Moore, Director of Indian Education, leads the SDCAC program as project director, and Ms. Angela Estes is the full-time project coordinator.

The SDCAC program focuses on five authorized activities: (1) Provide information to students and families on postsecondary education benefits, opportunities, planning and career preparation; (2) Conduct outreach activities for students who may be at risk of not enrolling in or completing college; (3) Assist students in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); (4) Implement professional development for guidance counselors at secondary schools to improve their capacity to assist students and parents; and (5) Offer need-based grant aid to students.

SDCAC works with a diverse set of partners to provide authorized activities to students and families across the state of South Dakota who are living below the poverty line. These activities include college and career counseling; advising and mentoring; college visits; information on post-secondary options, preparation, and financing; and assistance in completing the FAFSA.

SDCAC partners include various offices within the South Dakota Department of Education, Mid Central Education Cooperative –a local education agency–, and 7 institutions of higher education (IHE). Four of these IHE's are technical institutes –Western Dakota Tech, Mitchell Tech, Southeast Tech, and Lake Area Tech–, two are Tribal colleges –Sitting Bull Tribal College and Sinte Gleska University, and the final IHE is the University of South Dakota. In addition, SDCAC has partnered with the South Dakota GEAR UP state grant to provide FAFSA workshops.

The SDCAC partners have implemented all activities for this project. No major barriers or problems have been encountered; however, due to the amount of time required at the state level to process paperwork, funding to the Technical Institutes and Tribal Colleges was delayed. This

resulted in a postponement of services to these institutions. Considering the delay in start-up, it is commendable that the SDCAC partners were able to provide services to 2,059 students, 687 parents, and professional development to 254 middle/ high school and college admissions counselors. Now that the South Dakota Department of Education has a process in place, it is anticipated that more students, parents, and counselors will be served during year two.

The SDCAC program includes a need-based scholarship component. In addition to \$1,250 in federal funds, the SDCAC partners have provided \$12,520 in scholarships as match.

TENNESSEE

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Executive Summary:

Tennessee's College Access Challenge Grant is coordinated and administered by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) through the same office which administers the state GEAR UP grant. By design, Tennessee's CACG compliments and significantly enhances the depth and breadth of statewide college access and success programs, awareness, and partnerships. The CACG includes five programmatic components including sub-grants to non-profit organizations, two Outreach Specialist positions in the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC), professional development, enhanced public awareness and outreach campaign, and a collaborative college access course for pre- and in-service counselors. Following is a detailed description of the CACG management and five program components highlighting major outcomes, successes, and challenges.

Grant Management:

As the administrative body of the CACG, six THEC staff members are assigned to the grant with differing amounts of reportable time. Each staff member working on the grant splits their time and effort between the CACG and GEAR UP TN; grant staff time and effort is further detailed in Section III, Question 2, Part C. This staffing decision enabled THEC to overcome grant implementation delays set in place by state processes such as a quarterly budget expansion approval process and a statewide hiring freeze. Though the CACG and GEAR UP TN operate within unique mandates, goals, and objectives, the value added to each grant program through close and simultaneous operation is paramount. Implementation and realization of CACG successes occurred rapidly and in a high-quality manner, due to the strong foundation and knowledge-base created by GEAR UP TN. The CACG is able to learn from, and build on, GEAR UP TN experience. Tennessee's CACG program is a unique design and quite robust in the depth, breadth, and coordination of its five key components.

Sub-Grants:

The sub-grant procurement process started in September, 2008 with the release of a grant application to non-profit organizations in Tennessee working in the field of college access and success since September 27, 2007. THEC received seven applications in November 2008 which a committee read, reviewed and scored. Awards totaling \$350,363.80 were made to five non-profit organizations including the Alliance for Business and Training, the Ayers Foundation, the Girl Scouts of Middle Tennessee, the Oasis Center, and the Public Education Foundation after the submission and acceptance of application revisions. Contracts for four of these awards were finalized in mid-April, 2009. THEC received the final contract for the Public Education Foundation in early May, 2009.

Each sub-grant plans to use the awarded CACG funds to expand current college access and success programs and to serve a larger number of underserved, low-income, Tennessee students. In total, the sub-grants are directly serving 847 students across nine counties and plan to serve a total of 1,329 students in the first year of the grant. Sub-grantees are in the process of building an enhanced programmatic foundation from which the number and quality of programs, services, and recipients may greatly increase in grant year two.

TSAC Outreach Specialists:

Tennessee's CACG enabled TSAC to hire two additional Outreach Specialists and expand their direct services to students and families in Middle and Southeastern Tennessee through financial aid presentations at middle, secondary, and postsecondary institutions and college fairs. Due to the state hiring freeze, the hiring process for these two positions was delayed until January 2009. Following numerous interviews, two highly-qualified individuals were hired to start work on February 2, 2009. Already, the addition of the two Outreach Specialists to the TSAC staff has shown an increase in total outreach activities of 188 percent. The two Outreach Specialists served 761 students and 116 counselors from the beginning of February through the end of March. Such programs and services will only continue to increase in number and size as we enter the new academic year and as the Outreach Specialists become even more seasoned college access and success professionals.

Professional Development:

One of the major successes of Tennessee's CACG program this year was the 2009 Leadership Institute for school counselors. In partnership with the TDOE, the CACG hosted an intensive two and a half-day workshop for over 690 middle school and high school counselors from across the state. During the Institute, CACG staff presented three college access and career awareness sessions directly reaching over 200 participants. The CACG plans to build upon its success at this Institute, and is already working with the TDOE to plan and design a fresh and enhanced Leadership Institute for school counselors in 2010. Additionally, the CACG is focusing immediate efforts on intensive professional development opportunities for financial aid officers and higher education admissions counselors this fall.

As stated in Tennessee's CACG application, we plan to host two to three professional development workshops for pre- and in-service counselors, financial aid officers, and higher education admissions counselors each year. The CACG staff plan to continue to fulfill such goals and objectives through strong ties and close work with key partners such as the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE), TSAC, the five CACG sub-grants, and the Tennessee Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (TASF AA). CACG staff plan to host two workshops focusing on financial aid officers and higher education admissions counselors; these workshops are currently under development and are scheduled to take place in fall 2009 and spring 2010. A second Leadership Institute for school counselors is also in the development phase to take place in February 2010.

Public Awareness and Outreach Campaign:

A portion of the CACG funds are designated to increase the reach and frequency of campaign messages driven through the college access public outreach campaign started by GEAR UP TN. Through the CACG, additional collateral materials including a "Prepare" brochure focusing on college preparation was printed and distributed across the state through the CACG sub-grants. This summer, new initiatives including a "Pay" brochure, counselor toolkits, direct mail to

parents and guardians, and a second television commercial will further bolster the campaign and the CACG awareness and outreach efforts. In June, Walker plus Associates will conduct a full scale evaluation of year one of the public outreach campaign; the results of this evaluation will drive the direction, content and messaging of the campaign in year two of the CACG. Plans for phase two of the campaign already include a renewed partnership with the Tennessee Association of Broadcasters for media time, trayliners in fast food restaurants, increased collateral materials, and continued outreach to counselors and parents.

College Access Course for Pre- and In-Service Counselors:

In partnership with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina, Tennessee's CACG is working to develop an online counselor course to be used for professional development and college credit. The course focuses on tools to expand postsecondary education awareness and attainment with a primary audience of counselors working with underserved, low-income, and minority students. The course is well underway with plans to conclude the development phase in summer 2009. CACG staff and partner staff will pilot the course to in-service counselors for professional development credit in fall 2009 and will launch it as a full, credit-bearing, course in the spring semester 2010.

Conclusion:

Tennessee's CACG program faced numerous challenges in the beginning development and implementation phases directly related to state processes and a difficult economic climate. THEC staff diffused the impact of such challenges on grant management and implementation through prompt staffing arrangements, a solid knowledge-base, and strong partnerships.

Students and college access professionals across Tennessee have already witnessed and benefited from the CACG program. As outlined above, the five core components of Tennessee's CACG expand college access and success initiatives to reach many underserved, low-income, populations in every corner of the state. The sub-grants directly serve 847 students and nine communities in east, middle and west Tennessee; the TSAC Outreach Specialists help to expand total outreach activities by 188 percent; professional development initiatives included over 690 middle and high school counselors; the public outreach campaign introduced new brochures to students, parents and guardians, and plans to touch every middle and high school counselor in the state; and, finally, the collaborative online counselor course will fill a knowledge and instruction gap in counselor degree and professional development programs.

Tennessee's CACG demonstrates the high-level and high-quality success which derives from a strong foundation, capable, knowledgeable and determined staff, and meaningful partnerships. The grant is complex, with many moving parts each meeting objectives as stated in the grant application and each demonstrating strong momentum as we move into the next academic year.

TEXAS

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Executive Summary:

The Texas College Access Challenge Grant (CACGP) program is administered by Judith G. Loredo, Assistant Commissioner of P-16 Initiatives, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). Since August 13, 2008, a total of 84 CACG subgrants and grants from state matching funds have been awarded through a competitive process. Texas is using CACGP federal and matching funding for a plan with five primary components:

- 1) expansion of an existing outreach model called **College Connection**;
- 2) partnering with community-based organizations and institutions of higher education for outreach to minority communities through a newly developed **Community Partnerships** program;
- 3) creation and implementation of a public awareness campaign focusing on the importance of college readiness, the **College Readiness Awareness Campaign**;
- 4) provision of **professional development** for counselors, in collaboration with the Texas Counseling Association; and
- 5) deployment of college work-study students serving as **college access mentors** across the state.

Each part of the Texas plan builds on existing programs and/or works closely with other CACGP-funded projects or components. All program components are now underway.

Outcomes

It is too early in the process to cite specific outcomes (such as FAFSA completions, number of college applications completed, increase in college-going rate, increase in transfer rate, increase in awareness of financial aid) related to the activity of the funded programs, as most programs are just a few months underway. Preliminary data on the work done thus far, however, are provided in Attachment III.

Challenges

The timeline that was submitted was an ambitious one, and achievement of most milestones has been delayed beyond the projected dates. The delay is attributed to personnel changes at a leadership level for outreach activities at the THECB. The Senior Director for Outreach, who served in a leadership role for development of the CACG plan, abruptly left the agency in August 2008. His replacement began work at the THECB in January 2009.

The campaign for college readiness (\$1 million CACG plus \$500,000 state funds annually) was significantly delayed due to additional administrative requirements related to the size of the contract. Because the RFP was in excess of \$1 million, it required levels of approval external to the agency that were beyond those for contracts normally handled by the P-16 Initiatives and unanticipated by staff.

The number of fundable applications for College Connection sub-grants was lower than expected, thus the two-year awards will be funded with first year funding (CACG and match),

and an RFP will be posted for another round of College Connection 2 plus 2 plus 2 when second year funding to the THECB is approved. Staff is determining whether to modify the RFP and/or process and will provide additional technical assistance through a bidders' conference in order to improve the quality of applications received.

The THECB awarded sub-grants on a reimbursement basis, which has increased the lag time between allocation of funds to grantees and eventual draw-down of funds from the Department of Education.

Successes/Status

College Connection. Budgeted \$2,352,500 (\$1,890,000 federal, \$462,500 state). Awarded \$2,092,866².

A bidders' conference was held in October 2008. Nineteen College Connection proposals were reviewed, and 14 were selected for funding in November 2008. THECB staff provided technical assistance to unsuccessful applicants, which resulted in two additional awards in April 2009. (See Attachment I for more detail.) Programs were given awards for two years with the second year contingent on satisfactory progress.

Community Partnerships. Budgeted \$1,000,000. Awarded \$880,013 (first-year total).

A bidders' conference was held in October 2008, for potential applicants for Community Partnership programs. Twelve proposals were awarded by February 5, 2009 and two more were awarded following negotiation and technical assistance to applicants. (See Attachment II for detail; Attachment III for evaluation data.) Community Partnerships were funded for two years with the second year contingent on 1) the THECB receiving second year CACG funding, and 2) satisfactory progress.

College Readiness Awareness Campaign. Budgeted \$1,000,000 federal, \$500,000 state. Not yet awarded.

The THECB contracted with a marketing professional to assist in the development of an RFP, which was subsequently reviewed by entities within and external to the agency. Twenty six letters of intent have been received and proposals are due June 30, 2009. One FTE is allocated for supervision of this contract, and the agency has selected a highly qualified marketing professional to fill this role, with an effective start date of June 8, 2009.

Counselor Professional Development. Budgeted \$1,360,000. Awarded \$1,091,000.

A contract was issued by the THECB to the Texas Counseling Association (TCA) allocating \$100,000 of grant funds to produce the professional development sessions described in the grant. (Additional detail is provided in Section V.)

The THECB issued contracts (totaling \$991,000) to the 20 regional Education Service Centers (ESC) in the state to implement the professional development program in their regions. Each ESC received a base amount plus additional funds according to the size of their student population. They will collaborate with P-16 Council representatives to conduct the professional development modules for HB 400 schools (lowest 10 percent in college-going rate) and other high-need campuses from September 1, 2009 to August 13, 2010.

Work-Study Mentorship. Budgeted \$2,500,000 state funds. Awarded \$2,465,000.

For FY 09, the THECB has awarded 34 institutions of higher education with Work-Study Student Mentorship grants. Grants range from \$40,000 to \$175,000. Work-Study programs fund from 10 to 80 mentors (called *Collegiate G-Force* members) for a total of approximately 700 mentors statewide. These students must show financial need, and work in GO Centers in partnering high schools to promote a college-going culture.

Progress in Evaluation and Administration.

A Sharepoint site has been established for data collection, and sub-grantees were trained in its use. Two FTE program directors have been added to the P-16 Outreach staff to oversee CACG outreach components (Community Partnerships and College Connections). A CACG Program Evaluator started on May 8, and a College Readiness Marketing Program Director has been hired, with a June 8 start date.

UTAH

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Executive Summary:

Just prior to and in the months following Utah's College Access Challenge Grant year-one award disbursement, the Utah State Board of Regents staff in the Office of the Commissioner, as well as in the Utah Higher Education Assistance Authority (UHEAA) changed significantly due to the changing economic realities and the budget limitations that followed. Two key outreach staff in UHEAA that were to assist in grant activities left and were not replaced. Additionally, there were significant staff changes surrounding the appointment of a new Commissioner for Higher Education and Associate Commissioner for Finance. Furthermore, the principal investigator, who was to have oversight of administering the grant, left in September to assume new superintendent role at one of our school districts. Though we were making plans to implement programs and activities as outlined within the grant proposal, our early efforts did not have formal coordinated leadership.

Melissa Miler Kincart, who had contributed to the original grant proposal and who was employed half-time in the Office Commissioner of the Utah State Board of Regents, was asked to attend the October Washington DC orientation. At this time she met with the CACG Program Manger in an effort share the changes our organization had and was experiencing and to better understand the grant administration processes. After this visit, it was determined that Melissa would assume the role of Project Director in addition to her other duties. She would now split her time three ways between the grant, her role as Executive Director of Utah Campus Compact (Statewide organization promoting civic engagement), and the Utah Scholars Initiative/Regents' Scholarship development and implementation. Given the many personnel changes and the impending higher education budget cuts, and the fact that Utah in its original proposal had not sought administrative funds, it was determined that a proposal revision should be submitted. Melissa worked with CACG Program Manger through this process and a revised proposal was approved on January 22, 2009.

As a result of these many changes and realities, our agency got a late start on overall grant implementation, although we had had many activities in the works. We believe we have made tremendous progress in the implementation of our outlined activities over the past five months. Given that many of our activities concluded or came together late in April into early May, the CACG Program Manager granted us permission to report on our work through May 8, 2009. Contained within this report we have reported progress on all activities with exception of the Summit on Academic and Financial Preparation. We believe the foundational efforts of the work we have achieved in year-one of the CACG implementation will provide the launching pad for moving forward with this gathering in year-two.

The leadership change within the Office of the Commissioner, as well as immense staff turnover in the his office and our partnering agency UHEAA surely hindered our efforts in getting things off the ground. As mentioned above, our efforts were further hampered by the credit crunch, and the looming state budget cuts to higher education. In preparation for what might happen during our 2009 Legislative Session our outreach and Utah Scholars staff were instructed asked to maintain operations, but not deepen or expand our efforts because layoffs and programs cuts were inevitable. However, though our higher education system did sustain budget cuts, our outreach and state scholarship efforts did receive tremendous Legislative support with an appropriation of \$2.1 million in ongoing funding. Though this has been a difficult and challenging year in many respects for our work, this small miracle has brought about many changes and paradigm shifts that will aid us in being more successful with our implementation of the grant and other activities to better inform students, parents, counselors, and secondary school personnel about postsecondary options and thus potentially increasing the number of Utah students who qualify for Academic Competitiveness Grants.

As we look over the past few months, it is important to note the following successes that we attribute to the implementation of Utah's CACG efforts. First, the CACG proposal process and implementation has encourage the Office of the Commissioner and staff in the Board's financial outreach arm, UHEAA, to be more collaborative and intentional in their efforts to increase awareness and academic and financial preparation for postsecondary education. We are now working with a communications consulting firm to help us take multiple publications, brand them, and refine content into one comprehensive college guide that has useful and effective messaging for underserved students. Secondly, we are working together to launch a new web portal with other statewide partners to assist secondary schools, parents, and students in planning for college and the workforce. The portal and the publications will be completed this summer and we plan to host our first Utah System of Higher Education secondary school counselor conference, where we might share these two tools in addition to providing information on statewide scholarships, navigating the FAFSA, access and community partnership programs, assessment, testing/placement, and concurrent enrollment to name a few. We will also showcase our institutions of higher education, and their admissions, scholarship, and financial aid personnel will be on hand to share updates and answer questions.

Additionally, during the March 2009 State Board of Regents meeting Utah's CACG Project Director was able to share with the entire Board and Utah System Presidents information about the grant activities. This generated a good deal of interest and support as it is direct alignment with one of the Board's recently adopted strategic goals of increasing participation of Utah students. This commitment, coupled with obtaining on-going hard funding for staff, has lead to the creation of a new position within the Office of Commissioner. The CACG Project Director has been appointed as the new Assistant Commissioner for Outreach and Access and will assume this role on July 1, 2009. In this role she will have oversight for the CACG implementation, along with oversight and program development of the Utah Scholars Initiative and the Regents' Scholarship which are aimed to assist Utah students in academically and financially preparing for college as well as work closely with the K-16 alliance. She will also further her initial efforts to in working with a THINK Tank of access and outreach directors at five institutions of higher education in Utah's most Urban areas, in an effort to begin mapping out programs, target audiences and services so that we might identify gaps and look to ways to work collaboratively. The identification of these priorities along with aligning resources to support these efforts is an important step in Utah's efforts to close the achievement gap.

Another success worth mentioning is the creation of the 2009 UCC Mini Grant Program: ImPACT Improving Preparation, Access, & Communities Together in partnership with Utah Campus Compact. This funding opportunity was designed to strengthen or encourage collaborations between K-12 schools, communities, and colleges and universities to increase awareness and college-going rates of low-income and disadvantaged youth while increasing the ability of faculty and staff to create stronger links between academic coursework and engaging students in the community. The application was introduced February 28, 2009 at the Statewide Annual Conference on Civic Engagement and was due on April 15, 2009. We had six submission requests for funding. The selection committee enthusiastically selected three projects proposals to be awarded funding and have sent two others back for additional documentation and suggestions to strengthen the application and encouraged the team leaders to make revisions and submit to the committee for further consideration. The following are abstracts of the three funded projects to date to illustrate the exciting work and partnerships the CACG is helping to develop and strengthen here in Utah.

- Weber State University's Community Involvement Center and Education Access and Outreach office, in collaboration with the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program in the Ogden School District (OSD), the after-school program at Mount Ogden Junior High (MOJH), WSU's Child and Family Studies Department and WSU's Sociology Department, is proposing to strengthen and expand the Mentors for Utah Scholars program that provides academic and social support for OSD youth enrolled in the Utah Scholars program. The broad objective of the Mentors for Utah Scholars program is to provide university support to youth pursuing the Utah Scholars core curriculum while at the same time give Weber State students an opportunity to participate in meaningful community-based work-study, service-learning and volunteer experiences.
- Targeting several distinct student populations, and relying on collaboration among students, staff, and faculty at both institutions, the Westminster College-East High School Access for Success program is a multifaceted program that strengthens an existing partnership. Program activities include
 - Tutoring at-risk, ELL, new high school, and honors potential students
 - Collaborative teaching by high school and college faculty
 - Experiential, learning-focused field trips
 - College preparation workshops
 - Experience in applying lessons learned in the classroom
 - Sports and leadership activities on the Westminster College campus

The program includes planning and assessment activities to continue the collaboration in future years.

The *Adelante* Partnership is a university-school-community partnership that seeks to raise awareness of higher education opportunities and to increase the expectation of university attendance and success among students, families, and teachers at Jackson Elementary in Salt Lake City, Utah. Specifically, the partnership provides higher educational experiences to elementary students by taking them to the university via university visits and science camps, and brings the university to them via university student mentors of color. The *Adelante* partnership works in collaboration with the Center for Ethnic Student Affairs (CESA) at the University of

Utah and CESA Scholars Program, a first-year program serving students of color, to promote civic engagement and service-learning opportunities to CESA Scholars.

VIRGINIA

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Executive Summary:

Enhancing access through improved coordination of information and enhancing affordability through financial aid advocacy are two goals of the State Council of Higher Education of Virginia's (SCHEV's) six-year higher education strategic plan, "Advancing Virginia: Access, Alignment, Investment." In an effort to make progress toward those goals, SCHEV wrote the proposal for this grant and has administered the grant since its inception in August 2008.

Implementation of the grant initiatives has progressed as outlined in the grant proposal. Completed activities in each focus area have been well received as evidenced by the evaluation data collected. Attendance and participation in the activities associated with this grant have been robust.

One of the major successes of the grant is the expansion of an activity in focus area seven- Access Education Workshops. The grant proposal included the production of four television programs on financial aid. These programs were originally produced to be shown in the Tidewater region of the state on the Cox Digital Cable, Channel 106. To date, three programs have been produced and are shown on the education access channel four times a week and will continue throughout the year. The programs have featured Governor Timothy Kaine, high school students, and middle and high school counselors.

The programs reach approximately 21,250 households in the Tidewater region of the state. Aimed at students living at or below the poverty level, these programs are designed to provide students and their families with information about pursuing postsecondary educational opportunities and assist students with navigating the financial aid process. As a result of the success of the programs, SCHEV has secured viewing time on other education channels, statewide. The first program in the expanded regions of the state aired on March 27, 2009. It is estimated that the television programs are available for viewing in approximately 5.7 million households in Virginia and the greater Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The television programs are also available via video streaming on SCHEV's CACG Web site and via podcast on the Virginia Tidewater Consortium website.

Enhancements to the state's VirginiaMentor Web site were completed as scheduled. The enhancements include an update and expansion of the information/content and a site overview to assist visitors in navigating the site. Historically, the VirginiaMentor website has been used extensively by students, parents and school counselors throughout the state. With the enhancements, increased usage is expected.

The outreach effort for the “Super Saturday” event was another major success. Super Saturday was held on January 31, 2009 at 23 sites throughout the state. In partnership with the Virginia Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (VASFAA), the event was designed to provide students and parents with information on student financial aid and assistance in completing the Federal Application for Student Aid (FAFSA). In total, 2,822 students and parents attended the event. As a result of their attendance, 1,361 FAFSA applications were completed or initiated. A \$100 book scholarship was available to students who attended the event. Twenty-three scholarships were awarded to students from across the state.

In December 2008, 48 school counselors, career coaches and admissions and financial aid officers attended the fourth annual Virginia College Access Network (VirginiaCAN) conference in Staunton, Virginia. Evaluations of the event indicate that participants found the conference well-planned and designed and extremely helpful in enhancing their awareness and understanding of college access. The conference provided participants with an opportunity to attend presentations designed to enhance their awareness of tools that can be used to assist students with selecting, enrolling in, and paying for postsecondary education.

The barriers or challenges associated with the implementation of the grant initiatives have been minimal and centered on the administration of the grant. The barriers or challenges that have emerged relate to: (1) staff’s time; and (2) adherence to state government policies and procedures. Additional staff was not hired to administer the grant and the additional work has been absorbed by existing staff within the agency. State compensation policies have set compensation restrictions and limitations on the grant administrator. In spite of the challenges, the principal investigator has worked diligently to ensure that the grant initiatives progress as planned. The staff is committed to administering the grant in accordance with the proposal.

VIRGIN ISLANDS

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Executive Summary:

As the only accredited American, historically black college or university (HBCU) in the Caribbean serving a significantly diverse cultural, socioeconomic and linguistic population, the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI) is poised to significantly increase the number of unrepresented students who have access to enter and persist in postsecondary education.

In collaboration with the Virgin Islands Board of Education, the University of the Virgin Islands has worked to strengthen capacity in the United States Virgin Islands by working with middle and secondary school educators, the local American Counseling Association Chapter and the media to enhance the territory's families' awareness about the benefits of attaining a college education and methods of accessing and financing higher education in general. Through community workshops and seminars on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, (FAFSA), postsecondary education and supporting the professional development of counselors and key higher educational staff directly linked to the outlined goals and objectives of this grant, the University of the Virgin Islands has made notable progress in reaching the intended populations of this grant. Continued funding will ensure that the activities of this project will be conducted within the parameters of the stated objectives of the grant and in keeping with Title VII of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, 20 U.S.C. section 1141.

Major Outcomes and Successes

The College Access Challenge Grant project, as awarded to the Territory of the U.S. Virgin Islands and administered by the University of the Virgin Islands, has seen great gains since funding was received to conduct the objectives of the grant. These outcomes have been both qualitative and quantitative in nature and ultimately speak to the commitment of all partners and end-users of these services provided via the grant to work collaboratively in order to achieve the projected outcomes.

The American Counseling Association of the Virgin Islands (ACA of the VI) completed the contractual requirement of the university and was awarded the first disbursement of \$10,000 to initiate and implement a key component of the outlined objectives of the grant. As a result of this agreement in February of 2009 the College Access Challenge Grant's Educational Outreach Coordinator and the ACA of the VI were able to conduct the first of four major workshops designed specifically for counselors in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Over 100 attendees participated in the first territorial conference. Information on the CACG grant and an overview of the financial aid process were the topics covered during the session.

As a result of the initial launching of the partnership between the university's College Access Challenge Grant Program and the ACA of the VI, additional workshops targeting middle and high school counselors were implemented as facilitated by the Educational Outreach Coordinator. This partnership helped to engender enhanced interest in postsecondary preparatory training materials among counselors in the public school system. One of the major qualitative outcomes of this collaborative agreement was the increase in participation and engagement of the secondary high school counselors at one of the major public high schools in the District of St. Croix. The participation of this group of counselors in the workshops assisted in severing an infrastructural barrier in outreach historically encountered by the sub-grantee in the past. This fact is of particular interest and a major accomplishment for several reasons. This particular high school serves as one of the largest feeder schools to access the population that this grant seeks to impact. Through the outreach efforts and professional development training offered through the CACG, counselors have indicated a greater willingness to remain engaged in upcoming activities of the CACG and ACA of the VI. Additionally, workshop evaluations indicated that counselors have recorded high levels of satisfaction and enhanced knowledge as a result of participating in the workshops. The enhanced knowledge base reported by counselors is anticipated to be helpful in better preparing college-aged students for their educational transitions.

Another major accomplishment of the grant was the creation of the "*Perception of Access to Post-Secondary Education*" survey. This survey was developed by the staff of the Eastern Caribbean Center at the University of the Virgin Islands. This component of the institution has expertise in qualitative and quantitative data collection that spans the gamut of developing, administering, and analyzing surveys and assessments for local and federal grants to conducting Census data collection for the territory over the past decade. The survey was developed in keeping with the evaluative measures articulated in the grant application and is designed to determine the array of postsecondary educational services and activities that are currently available through school guidance counselors throughout the territory.

This survey is a twenty-five-item instrument divided into sections which are designed to capture data on counselors' knowledge of the FASFA application process, counselor postsecondary educational planning and training, postsecondary activities available to students, prioritization patterns of tasks by counselors in the public school system, counselor caseloads, parental involvement and counselor professional training and preparation. It is anticipated this would be distributed to counselors in both districts. To date, 42.5 percent of the total number of middle and high school counselors in the territory who have returned completed surveys. This reporting rate marks considerable progress to attaining the targeted outcomes in the first year of the grant expanded upon in the objectives. The "Perceptions of Access to Postsecondary Education" survey meets a major granting criteria of the CACG requirements for incorporating evaluative strategies to assess outcomes and impacts of the program's goals and objectives.

Challenges

One challenge that has surfaced in administering the grant is the unanticipated number of students who have delayed submitting their FASFA forms in conjunction with the general application used by the Board of Education. Representatives from the Virgin Islands Board of Education (VIBOE) have reported to the CACG Educational Outreach Coordinator that though the Board has received over 800 applications for scholarships from the eligible applicants is the

territory, less than 10 percent of this number have submitted the required FASFA form to date. Though this number is less than anticipated at this point in the grant cycle, it is anticipated that during the 2009 funding cycle the UVIBOE and CACG Coordinator have worked together to develop strategies for encouraging students to submit their FASFA forms. The VI Board of Education had committed to extend the deadline for applications and contacting applicants during this time to remind them to submit copies of their FASFA reports. It is anticipated that with these intervention strategies implemented, the first year CACG goals will be realized. Meetings with VIBOE representatives through the process have unveiled a very positive outcome of this collaboration. During the 2008-2009 application cycle representatives from the VIBOE reported that the territory received approximately 700 applications. During the 2009-2010 scholarship application cycle, the VIBOE has recorded an 8.75 percent increase in applications. This increase represents a significant step towards the CAGC goals of seeing a 10 percent increase in scholarship applications during the first year of the grant.

VERMONT

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Executive Summary:

The College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) awarded to the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) has provided an opportunity to positively influence the aspirations of Vermont's youth, particularly those typically under-represented in postsecondary education. The grant has allowed VSAC to connect with well over 4000 teens statewide, and help them develop and understand the path toward making their dreams for their future come true.

In order to increase the aspirations postsecondary education aspiration of these Vermont students, four main objectives were designed:

1. To improved the career development skills of middle and high school students;
2. To increase student postsecondary aspiration and continuation rates;
3. To increase the awareness and utilization among students of Introduction to College Studies; and
4. To increase awareness of and access to postsecondary programs through:
 - a. better alignment of high school curriculum
 - b. expansion of dual enrollment programs.

To meet the objectives of the CACG, **six primary strategies** were developed. Each one addressed one or more of the main objectives. Combined, these strategies aligned to begin to positively influence the aspirations of Vermont's students. Of course, this important work is only beginning. We do believe, however, that we have made positive and substantial steps toward our goals.

Strategy 1 – “Opportunista”

Our traveling “Opportunista,” a motivational speaker who is herself a first generation college graduate from Vermont, met with teen centers, Boys and Girls Clubs, in classrooms and other places teens could be reached. This year, she presented valuable information to and made connections with 4,206 teens.

Strategy 2 – Involving Parents

Providing parents who did not attend postsecondary education with tools to assist their children with the process is a key ingredient of CACG. This year, a new curriculum was developed with this in mind. “Look, Ask, Listen” is designed to help parents start the important conversations regarding education with their children, and has been successfully piloted at several middle schools in Vermont.

Strategy 3 – Start Where You Are

This award-winning interactive career development and college exploration Web site was expanded and enhanced during the year. A thorough assessment of current tools, research on needs of the population, and program development ideas was completed. Plans and a timeline are in the works for year 2, when the content will be added to meet the developmental needs of high school juniors and seniors. The anticipated completion date is fall 2009.

Strategy 4 – Vermont Career Gateway

Through extensive assessment involving the Vermont education community, a plan for the Vermont Career Gateway was developed that will focus on this tool as a primary site for teacher resources and professional development in the area of career development and college exploration. We focused on expanding the resources available, increasing awareness, and broadening usage.

Strategy 5 – Social Networking

The use of social networking and other internet-based communication techniques are seen as the next step in “meeting students where they are.” We want to create communities of students who are exploring career and educational opportunities, and taking concrete steps toward achieving their education and training goals. This strategy will be a major focus in the coming year, as it is necessary to have the Web-based components securely in place prior to implementation.

Strategy 6 – Collaboration with Dual Enrollment Programs

The goal with this strategy is to develop effective and engaging Web portals for the dual enrollment programs available through the Community College of Vermont (CCV), Vermont State Colleges, and other Vermont institutions. The intent of these portals will be to provide students and parents with user-friendly ways to access “Introduction to College Studies,” and other programs that allow those at risk of not attending postsecondary education the opportunity to try it out in a non-threatening, engaging way. At this point, a memorandum of understanding to develop the portal has been successfully signed by VSAC, CCV and the Vermont State Colleges. We will work closely with our partners to assure that all Web sites and portals complement each other and work to the students' and parents' advantage.

WASHINGTON

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Executive Summary:

The funding of CACG came at an optimum time when the Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) had just presented a state strategic master plan for higher education to the state legislature and sharpened its focus on getting more students participating and succeeding in college. The plan calls for adding more resources to address pipeline issues. The goals of the CACG align well with the state plan.

In the Washington College Access Challenge Grant proposal, we set two goals for our project:

- Increase the number of students from low-income families who are prepared for and will succeed in college and careers.
- Test models of sustainable public and private partnerships.

We are happy to report that we are on our way to meeting our goals.

Through a carefully planned and executed Request for Proposal (RFP) process, the HECB selected four non-profit organizations to work with to achieve our goals. They are:

- The College Success Foundation (CSF), a statewide college access foundation.
- The Northwest Education Loan Association (NELA), the state loan guarantor.
- The Metropolitan Development Council (MDC), TRIO-based non-profit organization.
- The Community Foundation of North Central Washington (CFNCW), GEAR UP-based non-profit.

The HECB set three priorities in the implementation of the CACG program:

- Support the Washington College Bound Scholarship (CBS).
- Support schools in providing information on college application and financial aid to students and families.
- Propose innovative approaches to increase the college-going rate among low-income students through effective personalized assistance.

In 2007, the Washington legislature created the Washington College Bound Scholarship, a program aimed at signing up 7th and 8th grade students whose families meet low-income guidelines. The state will offer the scholarship to cover costs of college as long as the students commit to work hard during middle and high school, graduate high school, and enroll in college. This became one of the main focuses of the Washington CACG. Through collaborative efforts

30,000 students signed up for the program so far. Our CACG sub-grantees have helped in carrying out outreach and awareness activities for the College Bound Scholarship program and are actively promoting a college-going culture in the state.

In addition, both the TRIO- and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)-based organizations worked directly with low-income students in schools and offer an array of activities such as college campus visits, college admissions and financial aid information, college and career counseling, and parental outreach and activities.

The state loan guarantor expanded its campaign and services to motivate students to take rigorous curricula, fill out the FAFSA, and set higher goals.

Other important milestones include the successes of the four non-profit organizations that we subcontract with:

1. The College Success Foundation, the Metropolitan Development Council (the TRIO program), and the Tacoma School District collaborated in creating a major event in Tacoma to promote the College Bound Scholarship. The College Success Foundation placed staff at eight of the nine Education Service Districts to promote CBS and provide local support. In addition, the Washington CACG is working with the National College Access Network and the Pathways to College Network to create a statewide college access network. The College Success Foundation is leading that effort.
2. The Northwest Education Loan Association (NELA), the state's loan guarantor, collaborated with the College Success Foundation, Seattle Public Schools, and other national campaigns such as College Goal Sunday and KnowHow2Go to reach more students and help them fill out College Bound Scholarship applications and FAFSA forms. NELA tripled the number of students in the "I'm Going to College" program, a national program specifically created for 6th graders, and extended outreach efforts to more low-income students through its Student Center in Seattle.
3. The Community Foundation of North Central Washington collaborated with the Wenatchee School District to expand GEAR UP services in all three middle schools. These services include parental activities, tutoring and mentoring services, academic preparation and college visits. They also worked diligently to eligible students in the College Bound Scholarship program.
4. The Metropolitan Development Council placed staff at two of the schools in Tacoma to work with individual students, creating opportunities for students and their families to raise their awareness for post-secondary options and visit college campuses.
5. Washington CACG worked with other states in a CACG consortium organized by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education to formulate an inter-state exchange of ideas and best practices.

The major challenge we faced during the implementation of the CACG program coincides with the budget shortfall and the downturn of the economy. As a result of the economic impact, the state instituted a series of measures aimed at creating budget savings. These measures include

travel and contract freezes. Such severe measures prevented us from moving forward to develop a web site/portal as proposed. We hope that we will have a better chance to advance that plan next year.

WISCONSIN

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Executive Summary:

Since the inception of Wisconsin's College Access Challenge (CACG) project, thousands of students and families have been given the opportunity to learn how to plan, prepare, and understand the options for paying for education beyond high school.

Wisconsin's CACG is being administered by Great Lakes Higher Education Guaranty Corporation (Great Lakes) on behalf of the Wisconsin Department of Administration. As the first step in implementing the project, Great Lakes assembled a College Access Advising team during October 2008 to support the work performed by counselors in Wisconsin's high schools. The team of six advisors, located in both rural and urban areas throughout the state, provides one-on-one counseling to students as they explore college options and complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and help students use free resources to increase ACT and SAT exam scores.

In addition to funding on-site services provided by the College Access Advisors, Wisconsin's CACG project is being used to expand and enrich collaborations with the state's colleges and universities, college access programs, the Office of the Wisconsin Covenant, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, the KnowHow2GOWisconsin initiative, and statewide College Goal Sunday events.

We have made significant progress toward each of the goals of Wisconsin's CACG project. Details supporting the major outcomes described below can be found in Section II: Goals and Objectives of this report.

Services to Counselors, Students, and Families

Since the inception of the grant, we have provided a number of educational services with regard to financial aid and Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion. This includes educational workshops and one-on-one advising for students and families, as well as counselor education. In addition, we have provided thousands of students and families with copies of Great Lakes' Student Success Guides containing information about the benefits of higher education, financial aid options, and planning and preparing for college.

Our College Access Advising (CAA) team provided 86 educational financial aid workshops for students and families (Goal 1). They also held 45 events for FAFSA completion (Goal 2). In addition, our advisors provided 720 hours of one-on-one counseling for students (Goal 2) and 31 workshops for school counselors (Goal 3), including 3 online training webinars.

The short amount of time between the announcement of the grant award and the start of the academic year posed the biggest challenge in our implementation of the CACG program. Because our six-member College Access Advising team was recruited from four geographical regions across Wisconsin, the recruitment process to bring highly qualified advisors on board within each region simultaneously was very time consuming. The first day of training for the College Access Advising team was held on October 27, 2008. Once the training period was complete, the advisors spent most of the months of November and December making initial contacts with counselors at the low-income high schools at which our grant services are targeted. As such, we were unable to begin to provide services in earnest until mid-December 2008—four months after the start date of the grant period.

Despite this challenge, we have achieved each of the objectives set forth in grant goals one through four related to providing direct services to counselors, students, and families.

College Goal Sunday

An additional element of Goal 2 of our grant program included support for Wisconsin's College Goal Sunday, a national initiative designed to provide free assistance to families completing and filing the FAFSA. Our objective for this goal was a ten percent increase over attendance at the 2008 event. College Goal Sunday took place on February 21 and 22, 2009, at 20 locations throughout Wisconsin. Despite severe winter weather on February 21, the events were an incredible success. More than 2,300 students and families attended—a 66 percent increase in attendance over the previous year.

Pre-college Program Replication

Goal 5 of our grant program includes an objective to replicate a successful pre-college program on another Wisconsin campus. During February 2009, Great Lakes hosted a forum of Wisconsin's top pre-college programs, and chose the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay's Phuture Phoenix program as the program to replicate on another college campus. The Phoenix program exposes at-risk students to the college experience, helping them believe that a college education is in their future. Campuses interested in replicating this program were invited to respond to a Request for Proposal by May 22, 2009. The campus chosen for replication will be announced during early June. We will provide support to both campuses throughout the remainder of the grant period as they work to successfully replicate the program on the new campus.

WEST VIRGINIA

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Executive Summary:

The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC) has successfully implemented a statewide comprehensive educational Web portal. The portal provides students and their families with a single source of information helping them to better prepare for and to finance postsecondary education programs. Although the portal is operational and is fulfilling its stated functions, refinements are still being made. Two components currently being added to the portal that will be operational by October 2009 are a middle school and an adult learner component. These modules will focus on informing and preparing students earlier than the traditional high school age and will also focus efforts on meeting the needs of adults who may want to either enter higher education for the first time or are interested in retraining for future employment.

The first stage of project goals stated in the College Access Challenge Grant (CAGG) proposal has been met. These goals pertain to the actual creation of the access web portal. Future activities will involve portal refinement, promotion of the portal through a statewide media campaign, and measuring anticipated outcomes through comparisons to baseline data. The comprehensive educational portal provides users with an integrated system that enables them to: (1) Increase their knowledge pertaining to financial aid resources; (2) Link students with postsecondary campuses and programs that meet their educational needs and interests; (3) Address academic preparation issues by providing a standardized test resource; and (4) Streamline admission and financial aid procedures through pre-populated, online applications reducing both time and effort.

The HEPC has collaborated with other agencies to coordinate statewide college access programs. The focus has been programs that are targeted to low-income, first generation, and other underserved populations. These efforts to expand statewide outreach efforts will continue. One step to be taken by the HEPC during summer 2009 is to hire a Communications Specialist to promote Web portal activities as well as integrate this message with other access efforts within the agency and state.

Challenges associated with grant activities pertain to the continued need to effectively communicate with other state agencies and likeminded programs. This communication ensures programmatic efficiencies as well as helps provide a statewide knowledge base pertaining to the myriad of access activities taking place and opportunities being provided. An example of a specific challenge is the HEPC efforts to coordinate with the West Virginia Department of Education (WV DOE) regarding the creation of a career exploration tool to be included within the web portal. The Web portal vendor, XAP Corporation, has a specific component that can be purchased as an add-on to the portal; however, the WV DOE has a separate vendor and platform with which they have been working to create a web-based resource. Conversations are currently

underway in an effort to discern how West Virginia can prevent duplication of efforts as well as confusion among its clients.

The educational web portal hosted more than 172,000 users from October 2008 through April 2009. The agency anticipates the number of users will increase as the portal continues to reach more West Virginians. Therefore, we believe the efforts to provide West Virginia students and their families with an interactive product designed to help them plan, apply, and pay for college has been successful to this point and will continue to grow. Future grant activities will center on refining the portal, promoting this resource statewide through a media campaign with a particular focus on first-generation and low-income families, and measuring outcomes by analyzing the level of portal usage as well as the number of college and Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) applications that are completed.

WYOMING

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Executive Summary:

Need-based Aid:

The State of Wyoming CACG Grant was used primarily to provide need-based aid to low-income students attending the University of Wyoming and Wyoming's seven community colleges.

In order to determine awards on a statewide basis, statewide data on Pell-eligible students was compiled and award amounts to each of the eight institutions receiving funds were allocated based on the percentage of Pell-eligible students with zero Expected Family Contribution attending each institution in order to prioritize students based on level of financial need. Of the \$330,000 awarded to the State of Wyoming, \$308,765 was used to award direct aid to students. When parsed on a statewide basis, allocations to individual institutions ranged from \$6,000 to \$106,000 per college with the highest level being allocated to Central Wyoming College which serve the Wind River Indian Reservation and has a high concentration of low-income/poverty level students.

Current Status:

The University of Wyoming will award \$17,000 for summer 2009 to use their full allocation and the remainder of the \$290,000 has been awarded. The amount of non-federal aid awarded to Pell-eligible students and available for match well exceeds the necessary \$153,000 and is being compiled for final reporting.

Academic Materials and Workshops:

Wyoming institutions receiving aid to distribute to CACG students chose a number of means of addressing the need for low-income students to be aware of academic and other resources available on their campuses. Colleges chose to make existing workshops available to CACG students, mail materials regarding academic services--especially tutoring services, purchased academic supplies such as academic planners for students, ensured that students were aware of financial aid services, and in almost all cases referred students to appropriate local TRIO programs and services.

All of Wyoming's community colleges have End-of-Course coordinators available through the University of Wyoming's outreach programs. The University of Wyoming and three of the community colleges have Student Support Services programs on campus and the university also

houses a McNair Scholars Program. Ensuring that students are aware of TRIO and like programs and their likelihood of meeting eligibility criteria is assumed to be our best means of ensuring long-term retention and success among needy students.

Hathaway Scholarship Maintenance Brochure:

The State of Wyoming's third primary initiative for CACG is to develop and widely distribute a brochure that outlines means by which students may maintain the state Hathaway Scholarship available to all Wyoming high school graduates who meet minimum exiting GPA and ACT scores. The state Hathaway Scholarship is relatively new and institutions of higher education have found that both scholarship recipients and institutional advisors have little knowledge of how number of credit hours, GPA, hours attempted vs. earned, and other factors impact a student's eligibility to maintain the Hathaway each year. Given that this is a statewide issue impacting retention and graduation at the university and all colleges, we intend to use CACG funds to disseminate information to college staff, faculty, and students.

Current Status:

In the spring 2009 session, the Wyoming State Legislature voted to make significant changes in the levels of Hathaway Scholarships available to Wyoming students and to codify and clarify issues regarding maintenance of the scholarship as well as means of "earning back" the scholarship once it has been lost. Staff at the Wyoming Department of Education is working with the new legislation to make it consistent and accessible and we plan to wait until that process is completed before producing brochures for distribution statewide. We do expect to be able to write them and get them printed this summer before the close of the grant year.

9/17/09

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