

**Northwest Educational Council for Student Success  
Strategic Partnership Memorandum of Understanding  
Fall 2010**

**Vision**

The Northwest Educational Council for Student Success is a consortium among School Districts 211, 214, 220 and Harper College. The Council will develop programs, share talent and data, and leverage joint resources to ensure that every high school and college graduate will have the opportunity to be prepared for 21<sup>st</sup> century careers and postsecondary readiness/success.

**Partnership Purpose**

- Create an intergovernmental agency, led by District 211, 214 and 220 superintendents and the Harper College president to leverage resources to pursue common goals to increase student success. To launch the partnership, Harper College will provide \$250,000 to be distributed by the Council to initiate innovative projects that support and improve student success.
- Begin proposed Council in fall 2010 and continue it for four (4) years as a Pilot Program to be outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding or as further determined by the voting members.
- Assign Harper College to act as the Fiscal Agent for the Council.
- Create a Decision Rules, Roles, and Responsibilities document that outlines the process for the distribution of funds.
- Direct funds to projects/programs that specifically address learning and student support efforts that increase college and career readiness and reduce the number of students placed in developmental education; increase the number of first generation students who aspire to achieve postsecondary degrees; increase the number of students of color who aspire to and achieve postsecondary degrees; increase the number of males who achieve postsecondary degrees; increase overall graduation rates and reduce attrition; decrease student achievement gaps.
- Foster and support a culture of inclusion so that every high school and community college student perceives himself/herself as capable of postsecondary participation and success.
- Provide joint resources to support common professional development and curriculum development initiatives that support the vision of the Council.

**Background**

The State of Illinois has established a P-20 framework to guide its education policy similar to that which has proven effective in many other states. The Illinois Public Agenda for College and Career Success, the state's blueprint for education policy—from preschool to graduate school—strongly recommends using a P-20 lens for policymaking and funding for the next decade.

“Building Community through Student Success” is the driving theme behind Harper College’s new Strategic Plan. It has set a new standard in which the Harper community, staff, students, sender school districts, and community stakeholders have a vested interest in continuing to building community partnerships, promote innovative projects, and improve the academic opportunities of students to that they may compete in an ever-changing and challenging 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Over the last year, the Superintendents of School Districts 211, 214, and 220 have been actively partnering with the Harper College President to ensure its new Strategic Plan sets the appropriate goals for all students. The superintendents were active in Harper’s Week of Engagement activities, including serving as symposium panelists, hosting a Principals’ Roundtable, and helping to guide Harper College’s

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future through active involvement in Harper's first ever Strategic Planning Conference. Harper College's current Strategic Plan includes the following strategic directions and goals:

**Strategic Directions**

- Create a culture of innovation, accountability and transparency at Harper College.
- Develop programs with educational partners that inspire postsecondary education and career readiness as a life goal.
- Increase completion and achievement of all students with a focus on underperforming student groups.
- Engage in partnerships to develop programs in existing and emerging career areas that enable students to succeed in a global economy.

**Goals**

Harper College will demonstrate our progress in these directions by accomplishing the following goals:

- Identify funding and leverage partner resources for innovative projects.
- Identify, monitor, and publish results on institutional effectiveness measures, key performance indicators and metrics for strategic goals.
- Create "stackable" career and academic pathways that incorporate industry-relevant and postsecondary credentials which lead to a sustainable income.
- Ensure P-20 curriculum alignment and transfer articulation.
- Decrease student achievement gaps of developmental, young males, and black, non-Hispanic students, while increasing academic excellence for all.
- Increase the percentage of first-time, full-time freshmen from our sender school districts who begin in credit-bearing courses.
- Inspire all students to seek postsecondary opportunities.
- Integrate career readiness skills into education and training programs with an emphasis on adult education.
- Increase the number of certificate and degree completers.

In addition to active involvement in developing the above, the three school district superintendents engaged in two separate strategic planning sessions with Harper College. These interactions resulted in a common understanding that to reach the next level of success for all students, we need to join resources in ways we never have before. This focus on increasing student success is the impetus for this partnership among School Districts 211, 214, and 220 and Harper College.

**Need**

National data demonstrates the current P-20 educational system in the United States has the following common barriers to successful college completion:

- P-20 curriculum is not aligned and does not allow for smooth transfer articulation;
- Student learning outcomes may not be aligned with workforce needs;
- Institutes of Higher Education are not prepared for the surge in enrollment, and classes are filled to capacity, forcing students to defer to a subsequent semester;
- Not all students are prepared academically, financially and socially for college success;

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- A significant number of students begin college in developmental courses, and half of these students do not complete them to begin college credit bearing courses.

Nationally, the majority of community college students - nearly 60% - are not academically prepared to handle the class work. Three out of every five community college students need at least one remedial course, and fewer than 25% of those students successfully earn a degree within eight years, according to the National Education Longitudinal Study.

Locally, the three school districts and Harper College have each been actively working on these issues and are outperforming the national averages. Averaged across the three districts, of graduates who attend Harper, 39% begin in developmental classes. Once at Harper, only 50% of these students reach college credit bearing courses. After three years at Harper, 50% of all students either graduate or transfer. Again, while these numbers outperform the national norms, the consortium entities agree they are not satisfied and are committed to improvement. The four educational leaders have reached consensus that the only way to take their performance to the next level is to partner and leverage resources to fund innovative programs and projects to improve student success and reduce achievement gaps through the Northwest Educational Council for Student Success.

The Council has identified four goals from Harper's Strategic Plan on which to focus. They are:

- Ensure P-20 curriculum alignment and transfer articulation;
- Increase the percentage of first-time, full-time freshman from sender school districts who begin in credit-bearing courses;
- Identify funding and leverage partner resources for innovative projects;
- Create "stackable" career and academic pathways that incorporate industry-relevant and postsecondary credentials which lead to a sustainable income.

**Commitment**

The Council members acknowledge the following realities that led to their commitment:

- While each district is currently outperforming the national norm for student performance, all realize the goal of career and college readiness and success has not yet been attained for all students;
- In order to reach a higher level of student success, all districts must partner in new ways;
- Since few additional resources are expected in the near future, we must find ways to leverage our current resources;
- Addressing our current student success gaps can have a dramatic impact on our students and our communities.

The partners will work to leverage their resources to meet the above. To launch the partnership, Harper College will provide \$250,000 to be distributed in the support of innovative projects that support and improve student success.

As responsible stewards of our resources with direction and passion for education, we view this partnership as an investment in our young people that will continue to bear fruit long after the initial seeds have been sown. This initiative will allow us to reaffirm our commitment as educators, create an invaluable partnership, and be recognized as a national model for other institutions to emulate.