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EDUCATION AND THE COMMUNITY



The Michigan College Access Network —Expanding Opportunity

By Lisa King, Assistant Director, MCAN

In 2009, the State of Michigan and a working group of key stakeholders representing K-12, higher education, youth-serving non profits, philanthropy and business came together to discuss a statewide strategy to improve college access and success. This working group recognized that in order for Michigan to build and sustain a vibrant economy and strong communities, we must work together to ensure that every Michigan resident completes a college degree or valuable credential.

Through the efforts of this working group, the **Michigan College Access Network** (MCAN) was established as the statewide coordinating body for college access resources, programs and services. The organization identifies areas of gap and duplication and provides a forum for college access professionals to share best practices. It is MCAN's mission to dramatically increase Michigan's college participation and completion rates, particularly among low-income and first-generation college students of all ages.

"A high school diploma simply is not enough to complete in the 21st century economy," says Brandy Johnson, Director of Michigan College Access Network. "Everyone in Michigan needs to enter the labor market with a college degree or valuable credential in hand, period."

According to a September 2010 special report from the Lumina Foundation for Education, 35.6 percent of Michigan's 25 to 64 year olds possess at least an associate's degree, ranking Michigan 33rd among all states. Michigan's rate lags behind the national average of 37.9 percent. Despite once being the global leader in educational attainment, the United States now ranks 12th among economically developed countries.

"The Lumina Foundation has called on the nation to increase higher education attainment rates—the proportion of the population that holds a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential—to 60 percent by the year 2025," says Johnson. "We have accepted this call by adopting 'Goal 2025' to increase Michigan's postsecondary educational attainment rate to 60 percent."

In order for Michigan to achieve this goal, Michigan College Access Network is employing a number of strategies including coordination, advocacy and professional development. MCAN also supports community-based college access initiatives through hands-on technical assistance and funding opportunities.

Currently, MCAN supports 32 local college access networks reaching communities across the state from Benton Harbor to Detroit, Jackson to Charlevoix and Sault Saint Marie to Houghton. These local college access networks (referred to as LCANs) coordinate programs, services and resources that lower the barriers preventing students, particularly low-income and/or first-generation, from pursuing postsecondary educational opportunities. In each community, leaders in education, the nonprofit sector, business, government and philanthropy work together to design and implement a local strategy that fosters a college-going culture and dramatically increase the college participation and completion rates.

"The local college access networks are key to improving college access in Michigan," says Johnson. "By developing a local network, the community works together in identifying current assets and gaps to ensure they are building a strong and highly successful college access strategy."

An excellent example of the work happening on a local level is Muskegon Opportunity, which serves as the local college access network for Muskegon County. It provides broad-based student preparation programs such as the KnowHow2Go Road Show and financial aid and scholarship assistance, and intensive student support programs by coordinating mentoring programs in six high schools in the county.

Michigan College Access Network also supports two statewide college access initiatives: the Michigan College Access Portal and KnowHow2Go. The **Michigan College Access Portal**, referred to as MichiganCAP, is a free online portal for students to plan, apply and pay for college. This statewide initiative simplifies the process of transitioning from high school to college and career. MichiganCAP offers students, parents, counselors, advisers and adult learners easy-to-use, web-based and personalized tools to ensure that each step in the process of choosing and applying to college is completed seamlessly.

KnowHow2GoMichigan is a public awareness campaign designed to encourage and prepare low-income students and their families to take the necessary steps toward

college. This campaign, sponsored by the Lumina Foundation, the Ad Council and the American Council on Education, urges young people to take the necessary steps to prepare for college. It has many resources such as the KnowHow2Go Road Show which is a 45-minute interactive talk-show-style presentation that aims to give students information about postsecondary education from the earning power of various degrees to the types of jobs available with those credentials.

The Michigan College Access Network continues to grow and improve college access and success efforts in Michigan. As MCAN increases its efforts, it regularly seeks opportunities to expand the local college access networks. Any community interested in developing a local college access network may submit an "Intent to Apply" by August 5, 2011 and submit a Planning Grant proposal by September 2, 2011. 



Resources:

Michigan College Access Network website:
www.micollegeaccess.org

KnowHow2GoMichigan website:
www.knowhow2gomichigan.org

Michigan College Access Portal:
www.michiganacap.org

MCAN Facebook Page:
www.facebook.com/micollegeaccess.org

KnowHow2Go 4 Steps:

1. Be a Pain
2. Push Yourself
3. Find the Right Fit
4. Put Your Hands on Some Cash