

# **Fostering College and Career Readiness through Afterschool and Expanded Learning Opportunities**

## *A Forum*

**February 8, 2013**

College and career readiness has become a major focus of high school reform efforts. While schools have intensified their focus on instruction that prepares students for college and career readiness, opportunities for students to learn about college and career options, to engage in activities that expose them to such options, and to learn many of the skills required to be college and career ready are often limited during the school day. Research demonstrates high quality afterschool and expanded learning opportunities can have a positive influence on a range of student outcomes, including awareness about and preparation for college and careers. This forum highlighted initiatives in Indiana and Illinois that are helping students strengthen the knowledge and skills needed to prepare for college and careers through learning opportunities that occur beyond the school day.

**Debbie Zipes, Executive Director, Indiana Afterschool Network (IAN)**, described how IAN, one of 41 statewide afterschool networks supported by the C.S. Mott Foundation, seeks to ensure all K-12 youth in Indiana have equal access to high quality out-of-school time programs that prepare them for success in school, work, college, and life. The IAN has made college and career readiness an explicit aim of its statewide efforts through the development of college and career readiness afterschool standards and other tools to help afterschool programs across the state.

In Indiana, the Lumina Foundation has set Goal 2025, which is to increase the number of Americans with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025 and all of the major educational institutions, including many out-of-school providers, have aligned around this goal. Out-of-school-time hours provide a huge opportunity to build on the school day, and when IAN surveyed program providers, 99 percent of out-of-school-time programs indicated they wanted to focus on college and career readiness, and they wanted IAN to develop a cohesive strategy. Together with its partners, IAN has created a vision and shared measurement system to document progress toward expanding high quality college and career readiness experiences for K-12 youth across the state. In order to define quality and identify the resources and supports that need to be put in place to achieve the vision, the partnership created Indiana Afterschool Standards that include three specialized sets of afterschool standards focused on STEM, College and Career Readiness, and Summer Learning.

Afterschool programs in Indiana are tracking their results, which are being gathered at the state level, and this makes it possible for IAN to target professional development programs across the state based on programs' knowledge, expertise, and needs. The Indiana Afterschool Network and its partners are creating a cadre of expert trainers that can then help train staff at programs that want to institute the Indiana Afterschool Standards. In addition, because many youth workers need more awareness of

postsecondary education and career pathways, IAN is working to infuse a focus on college and career readiness into college programs providing training and credentials in youth development.

**Robert Kizer, President and CEO, Starfish Initiative**, described how his ten-year-old organization in Indianapolis, Indiana, provides four years of individual mentoring support to promising low-income students. The program serves 350 high school Scholars through community-based programming that includes one-on-one “college coach” mentoring that is relationship-based and offers college information, cultural and social experiences, career exposure, life-skills and personal development, and civic engagement opportunities. All Starfish Scholars are low-income, two-thirds are female, two-thirds will become the first in their family to graduate from college, and 60 percent live in a home headed by a single parent or grandparent. Fifty-one percent of program participants are African American, 28 percent are Caucasian, 28 percent are Hispanic, 12 percent are of mixed race, and 4 percent are classified as “other.”

Starfish Scholars must be Twenty-first Century Scholars (a program in Indiana) and have a minimum GPA of 2.5. The Twenty-first Century Scholars program provides funds for up to eight semesters of paid college tuition, and the Starfish program is helping young people to succeed in high school so they are able to claim that benefit. In fact, ninety-eight percent of Starfish graduates are awarded scholarships for postsecondary education, a rate that is twice that of all Twenty-first Century Scholars.

The Starfish Initiative boasts impressive outcomes. Eighty-eight percent of Starfish Scholars complete all four years of Starfish programming. Of those completing the program, all graduate from high school, and 98 percent go on to college. Of those Starfish Scholars who continue to postsecondary, 82 percent have or are currently pursuing a postsecondary degree.

**Mary Ellen Caron, CEO, After School Matters**, provided an introduction to her Chicago, Illinois-based afterschool program. After School Matters (ASM) provides project-based apprenticeship opportunities for public high school students through a network of public-private partnerships that enables students to gain valuable career exposure and skill development. Started in 1991 to fill a void in programming for teenagers in the afterschool hours, ASM currently provides 22,000 opportunities per year for young people to participate in their program.

Youth participants in ASM are able to take part in activities that might not be available to them otherwise, categorized into such areas as Arts (e.g., dance, music, visual arts), Technology (e.g., tv/video production, computer programming and refurbishing, robotics), Science (e.g., lab science, gardening, math, engineering), Words (e.g., creative writing, poetry, debate, journalism, public speaking), and Sports (e.g., life guarding, swimming coaching, first aid, sports instruction). While any high school student in the City of Chicago may participate in ASM programs, most participants are from underserved populations.

A recent Northwestern University evaluation observed ASM was developing college and career readiness skills in participants. But the process was not overt; instructors were not telling their students explicitly that they were preparing them for college and career. The Northwestern team recommended ASM become much more intentional about the college and career preparation aspect of the program, and as a result, ASM is currently engaged in a College and Career Readiness Demonstration meant to further develop its programs' college and career preparation components. Through this demonstration, ASM is collecting best practices within the program and developing a professional learning community for its instructors.

### **Question and Answer Period**

*What kind of partnerships can best facilitate this work and move the needle on outcomes?*

Ms. Zipes explained that IAN has learned to partner with larger, more powerful organizations. This makes it possible to get more funding and support.

Mr. Kizer explained that the Starfish Initiative partners with other organizations to place students who are not eligible for Starfish. In addition, business leaders are interested in educating the next workforce, so Starfish says "let's educate them now and let them shadow, do internships, etc. with your business."

After School Matters has an air of collaboration and not competition, explained Ms. Caron. The organization is especially aware that they need to work well with local schools.

*What is the average attendance in your programs?*

Starfish Initiative: Attendance is about 80 percent.

After School Matters: Attendance is 75 to 80 percent, depending on time of year.

*What are the skills in which you need to train your mentors and how do you make that happen?*

Mr. Kizer explained that for the Starfish Initiative the most significant training element is training about poverty. Starfish wants to make sure it is training mentors very well in this area. Starfish supports each mentor-mentee match with a Match Specialist who helps the Mentor understand how to do their job. Starfish has an 80:1 ratio of Match Specialists to Mentors.

Ms. Caron shared that ASM instructors look very much like their students. Many were participants in ASM themselves. They relate to the young people very well; therefore, most instructor training is focused on college and career readiness.

*Young people with disabilities are one of the groups least likely to have access to these types of programs. What do you do to recruit students with disabilities and how do you accommodate their needs?*

Twenty-five percent of ASM participants have special needs. The arts are a great area for young people with special needs, asserted Ms. Caron, and ASM does well in this area. But, she continued that ASM needs to work on moving disabled young people into the sciences and other fields.

Ms. Zipes reported that IAN is adding a question about serving students with disabilities as it maps the statewide database. This will provide them with information about where there are gaps.

*Do after school programs give students opportunities to have new experiences that are not based at school but in the community?*

After School Matters programs start in neighborhoods, but as students get more advanced, they move to programs in downtown Chicago. In the summer months, downtown programs are housed in tents in Millennium Park. It is very important that we do not keep kids isolated in a poverty situation where they do not have other opportunities, said Ms. Caron.

Ms. Zipes pointed out that in rural communities it can be hard to offer students the opportunity to travel to other places and meet young people from other areas.

*What is the best age to begin mentoring services?*

The Starfish Initiative has experimented with bringing in cohorts at different ages and has found it is important to bring them in at young ages. Mr. Kizer said that in Starfish's experience, 9th grade, when students make that transition to high school, makes a lot of sense.

Ms. Zipes offered that the highly successful College Mentors for Kids matches mentors with 3rd graders.

Ms. Caron said 9th grade best. "But if we had more money, we would definitely have a middle school program feeding into ASM."