



Blueprints Newsletter

Redesigning High Schools for the 21st Century

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Minnesota College Application Week

By: Jessica Espinosa, Center for Postsecondary Success, Minnesota Department of Education

An educated workforce is the foundation needed for Minnesota to maintain a productive and prosperous society. Demographic changes in our state will make it increasingly difficult to achieve this goal without engaging more students in higher education. We know that many students are falling through the cracks as they navigate our education systems from K-12 to postsecondary. Historically underserved populations continue to lack equitable representation in higher education, and an aging workforce and global competition have significantly increased the need for a college-educated population. If Minnesota is to continue to be a leader in education and economic development, we will need to significantly increase the number of first generation, low-income, and students of color pursuing and completing a postsecondary certificate program, associate's degree or a bachelor's degree.

As part of a national initiative to increase access to higher education, Governor Mark Dayton proclaimed the week of November 14-18, 2011, Minnesota College Application Week. The national "College Application Week" initiative intends to address one of many barriers students may face in accessing postsecondary education, and this week provided an opportunity for high schools and postsecondary institutions to collaborate in a concentrated effort to engage and inform underrepresented students (first generation college students, students of color, and low-income students) about the college application process. The main goal of this effort is to increase the number of all students completing a college application, with a special focus on underrepresented students.

From Thief River Falls to St James, 29 schools from across the state requested to be pilot sites representing urban, suburban and rural areas of Minnesota. Of the 29, 17 were identified as official pilot sites although all interested sites participated in the initiative. These sites were asked to coordinate and dedicate time during the regular school day, during this week, to work with seniors to complete a college application with the assistance of trained school staff and volunteers.

A steering committee was developed that includes a variety of stakeholders from both K-12 and higher education as well as representatives from community organizations. Committee members made valuable contributions to the design and launch of the initiative effort and also shared information through their networks, further generating enthusiasm and support for the initiative. Many well-qualified personnel from postsecondary institutions offered to help by providing assistance at the school sites. The volunteers dedicated time to helping students to complete applications and provided expert information about college, financial aid, enrollment and admissions.

One of the most important contributions to the first year of College Application Week was the support from Minnesota's postsecondary institutions, many of which waived their application fees for

qualifying students during that week, in addition to those postsecondary institutions that already have a fee waiver policy for low-income students. Many high schools sites reported that this was a critical point of access for many of their students who decided to apply to college for the first time.

In an effort to further heighten awareness, the pilot site high schools received visits from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) leadership team including Commissioner Brenda Cassellius, Assistant Commissioners Elia Bruggeman and Rose Chu. The new director for the Office of Higher Education, Larry Pogemiller, also visited sites during the week. This was a great show of support!

The first year of the initiative experienced some notable successes. The 17 pilot high schools, serving over 3,000 Minnesota seniors, collectively indicated that more than half of their students submitted at least one application by the end of the week. Many other high schools reported strong participation in the initiative as well. The Minnesota State College and University (MnSCU) system reported that during the week of November 14-18, 2011, nearly 10,000 high school students submitted 15,600 applications to the 31 state colleges and universities, compared to 4,900 students who submitted about 5,500 applications during the same week in 2010. For example, at Northwest Technical College, three times more applications were received than during the same week a year ago. At Bemidji State University, over 1,000 students applied, compared to 141 last year. Minnesota State University-Mankato had 2,118 applications compared to 501 during the same week in 2010.

The University of Minnesota Twin Cities reported receiving 882 applications from Minnesota students during College Application Week (for fall 2012 admission). During this same week in 2010, 756 applications were received from Minnesota students. This reflects about a 15percent increase.

Naviance, a reporting tool used by many high schools to track the college admissions progress for their students, documented that as of December 1, 2011, Minnesota seniors (class of 2012) submitted 33,678 applications for admission to either one of the University of Minnesota campuses, one of the MnSCU campuses or one of the Minnesota Private Colleges.

We are excited about continuing to grow this promising initiative. Registration for high schools interested in participating next fall will be available through the Minnesota College Access Network website in early May. Register your high school as a College Application Week site for the 2012-2013 school year, get support and information to help guide your students and help enhance the path to postsecondary success for more of your graduating seniors!



Picture 1: Staff and volunteers from Brooklyn Center High School.

Designer Showcase

College Application Week at Robbinsdale Cooper High School

By Laura Ritter, College Counselor at Cooper High School

When our school heard that Governor Mark Dayton proclaimed November 14-18, 2011, as Minnesota College Application Week, and the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) was looking for pilot sites, we anxiously submitted our application. Robbinsdale Cooper High School is a large, diverse high school and in a first ring suburb of Minneapolis. Like many local high schools with a high number of first generation students, we struggle to get students motivated in the fall to start the college application process, so we were thrilled when we were chosen as one of the 17 pilot sites.

With the support of our head principal, Mike Favor, we quickly put together a team of counselors, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) teachers, and college and career specialists to coordinate the planning for the event. In order to gain more information about our seniors, we surveyed our students through our advisory program. This survey provided us with valuable information to determine which students would need the most support. We carefully scheduled each student into our "College Application" computer lab to help them with the application process. If students were not ready to apply, high school and college counselors were available to help them create a post secondary plan.

Throughout the week, volunteers from a variety of backgrounds were scheduled to help students with the application process. The collaboration of high school counselors, teachers, college admissions counselors and National Guard members truly made it a team effort.

Our results were astounding. At the start of the week, only 18.1 percent of our seniors had applied to college, and by the end of the week, 68 percent of our seniors had submitted an application.* Cooper's Class of 2012 was energized and word quickly spread about "College Application Week." There was a buzz in the hallways, encouraging others to take their turn applying to college.

Minnesota College Application Week made a great impact at Robbinsdale Cooper High School. We look forward to planning the event for Cooper's Class of 2013 and know it will be even more successful!

For more information about their efforts, please contact Laura Ritter: Laura_Ritter@rdale.org.

*statistics were taken from Naviance

College Application Week at Grand Rapids High School

By Jan Bilden, Counselor at Grand Rapids High School

Grand Rapids High School was one of 17 pilot sites for College Application Week last fall, an extension of a national initiative for a concentrated effort to engage and inform students about the college application process, particularly first generation, students of color and low-income students. We were excited to be chosen because we knew that we had many seniors who had made a decision regarding their postsecondary enrollment but had not yet not applied, some seniors had completed one application and needed to have options, and others that had not yet developed a postsecondary plan.

November 14-18 was also our fall conference week and students did not have classes on Thursday or Friday, so we did our promotional efforts the week prior and made full use of the three days

available. According to our data, 150 seniors filled out a college application, taking advantage of a free transcript, many fee waivers from colleges and assistance to complete applications.

We were honored to have Joni Petschauer, Senior Fellow from the American Council on Education to assist and observe during the week, and Dr. Rose Chu, Minnesota Assistant Commissioner of Education visit as a follow-up.

The week had a significant impact on our students, not only seniors but all grades, in raising the level of awareness regarding postsecondary education and the processes and in taking measurable steps towards enrollment. Grand Rapids High School will be sure to have College Application Week next year and recommends involvement to all Minnesota high schools.

For more information about our events and activities, please contact Jan Bilden: jbilden@isd318.org.

Measuring Up

National College Application Week

Applications to Minnesota State Colleges and Universities skyrocketed over a year ago during the first-ever National College Application Week, an initiative to increase access to college, particularly for students from groups underrepresented in higher education. [View data chart for all Minnesota State Colleges and Universities](#).

National College Application Week Minnesota Participants	November 15-19, 2010	November 14-18, 2011
Total Number Application Submitted	5,504	15,657
Total Number of Applicants	4,912	9,993

Source: Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU).

High School Toolbox – Strategies and Resources

Requests to participate in the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Completion Project have been extended for single high schools and rural high schools until May 1, 2012. [View FAFSA Completion Project \(Data by Student\): Single-High-School Local Education Agencies](#).

A goal of Minnesota College Application Week, an initiative at the high school site is to increase the number of all students completing a college application with a special focus on first generation college goers. [View Minnesota College Application Week Resources 2011](#).

Minnesota Office of Higher Education's Get Ready for College website, provides links to postsecondary applications and fee waiver information. [Visit Get Ready for College Website](#).

The **Pathways to College Network** is an alliance of national organizations that advances college opportunity for underserved students by raising public awareness, supporting innovative research and promoting evidence-based policies and practices across the K-12 and higher education sectors. The Pathways to College Network is directed by the **Institute for Higher Education Policy** (IHEP). [Visit Pathways to College Network website](#).

[Read College Access Matters I: The Opportunity for College Access Programs in Minnesota](#). A recent report that identifies "opportunity counties" that are underserved by college access efforts.

[Read College Access Matters II: Diverse Student Pathways to College in Minnesota](#). This study looks at college going behaviors and the supports in place to help students on their pathway to college.

Help Desk

[Visit Minnesota College Access Network \(MCAN\) website](#) for training, resources, research, events and networking opportunities related to college readiness, access and success. Visit MCAN's Facebook Page and like it to receive regular updates.

Minnesota College Goal brings together financial aid professionals from colleges and universities, along with other volunteers, to help college-bound students and their families complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). [Visit Minnesota College Goal website](#).



On the Drawing Board - Calendar of Events

Events sponsored by MDE, unless otherwise noted

[National College Access Midwest Regional Meeting](#)

(St. Paul) April 12, 2012

[International Graphic Arts Education Region One Spring Workshop](#)

(Brooklyn) April 13, 2012 and (Roseville) April 14, 2012

[2012 Minnesota School Counselors Annual Conference](#)

(Brainerd) April 29-May 1, 2012

[Minnesota College Access Monthly Networking Meeting](#)

(White Bear Lake) **May 4, 2012**

[It's About Time!](#)

(Roseville) May 7, 2012

[Supermileage Challenge](#)

Sponsored by: Minnesota Technology Engineering Educators Association (MTEEA)
(Brainerd) May 14-15, 2012

[Solar Boat Regatta](#)

Sponsored by: MTEEA and Minnesota Renewable Energy Societies
(St. Paul) May 19, 2012

Blueprints is a publication of the Center for Postsecondary Success

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