Inside the Council

Program Opens College Doors To Austin Grads

More than 3,100 high school graduates of the Austin Independent School District in Texas will experience a "seamless transition" to higher education thanks to a new program, according to district officials.

The graduating seniors have received official college acceptance letters from Austin Community College through a partnership called College Connection between the Austin school district and ACC.

During the spring semester, the College Connection program provided seniors at all 12 Austin high schools with comprehensive information and individual assistance in completing the application process to ACC. This included financial aid, individual academic advisement, testing and career planning.

"The first year of College Connection has been remarkably successful due to the solid partnership we have with ACC," said Austin Schools Superintendent Pat Forgione in a press release.

"We have provided many seniors with a seamless transition to higher education by awarding them both their high school diploma and a college acceptance letter at graduation," he stressed.

Steve Kinlow, president of Austin Community College, says of the program, "College Connection increases access to higher education for thousands of students, and is an innovative partnership in which AISD (Austin Independent School District) and ACC are responding to the state's 'Closing the Gaps' challenge to dramatically increase enrollment in higher education."

Council Creates New Post

Ricki Price-Baugh, retired assistant superintendent of curriculum and instructional development for the Houston Independent School District, has been named to a new position at the Council of the Great City Schools.

She becomes director of academic achievement after serving on numerous Council support teams in the area of curriculum and instruction. She is looking forward to providing urban school districts with "high-leverage research, support and tools," she emphasizes.

"We created the position as part of the Council's overall efforts to help its membership boost student achievement," says Council Executive Director Michael Casperly. "Ricki brings extraordinary experience in curriculum, instruction, professional development, bilingual education and instructional technology to the Council's table."

Since retiring from the Houston school system last year, Price-Baugh has provided consulting services to school districts and educational organizations to design curriculum as well as strategies to improve student achievement.

She has been a teacher, curriculum director and adjunct professor, and holds a doctorate in educational administration from Baylor University.

Chicago's Top-Performing Schools Rewarded With Autonomy

As a reward for high achievement and sound management, the Chicago Public Schools will give 85 elementary and high schools increased autonomy from the school system's central office, beginning this fall.

These schools have been designated Autonomous Management and Performance Schools (AMPS), allowing them to implement a restructured day calendar, tailor their own professional development schedule to their individual needs, and spend funds and transfer funding from one program to another without area instructional officer approval.

"We looked hard at all of the factors that go into creating a successful school that truly serves the needs of our students," says Chicago Schools Chief Executive Officer Arne Duncan in a press release. "These schools have obviously got it figured out. The best thing we can do is get out of their way."

To qualify for the AMPS program, schools had to meet criteria determined by a committee of Chicago school system administrators, encompassing student performance, management, school climate and special education.