

HTC's College Readiness Advocate Program

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to evaluate and provide recommendations for Hennepin Technical College's (HTC) College Readiness Advocate Program. The Readiness Advocate Program is a partnership program between Hennepin Technical College and area high schools focused on preparing high school students for college. The analysis of the program was conducted by a Luoma Leadership Academy Action Learning Team in 2011/2012 and draws upon observational data, a review of current research, and a review of other college readiness programs in Minnesota and elsewhere..

An evaluation of the HTC readiness program finds the following strengths and challenges:

Strengths:

1. HTC is flexible in how they work with schools. Though it leads to inconsistency in program methodology, it helps foster partnerships that serve students.
2. HTC incorporates most or nearly all components and interventions that are found in programs that have been identified as national models/best practices.
3. HTC strongly emphasizes a "high touch" approach. They try to establish ongoing relationships with students over the course of their entire high school career.
4. HTC does not simply recruit for its own college. The school is focused on readiness interventions that prepare students for all types of higher education opportunities and career pathways.
5. HTC focuses on key academic readiness issues. It helps identify gaps in key areas including math and English.
6. HTC seeks to create successful partnerships with schools (and school districts) and get involvement and endorsement of school leadership as well as staff, teachers, and counselors.
7. HTC has had a track record of success with the students it has been able to track and measure
8. Advocates are well trained, knowledgeable, skilled, and passionate about their work.

Challenges:

1. The HTC program approach is not consistent across all schools. Activities and emphasis vary by school.
2. There is a lack of "soft skills" readiness curriculum within the HTC readiness program.
3. HTC does not follow up with students that attend colleges other than HTC.
4. It is difficult to isolate the impact of specific interventions on student success.
5. There are some logistical communication problems between HTC and high school staff and leadership.
6. Emphasis is often on completing high school, which is not necessarily the same as being college ready.
7. Access to resources at the high schools can be inadequate (students, facilities, administrative records, teachers).
8. A lack of sustainable funding of the program is a problem, leading to a "cobbling together" of funding sources.
9. For-profit schools are marketing heavily to students, which impacts the ability to work effectively with students.

The Action Learning Team recommends HTC take the following actions to strengthen its Readiness Advocate Program:

1. Settle on a clear definition of "College Readiness," including both academic and soft skills.
2. Create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as a base agreement between HTC and high schools.
3. Produce a short Program Annual Report for high schools and foundations.
4. Offer a Career Assessment Inventory or a similar occupation identification inventory to high school students.
5. Conduct exit interviews with program participants.
6. Devise and implement a system for tracking program participants after high school graduation.
7. Establish a metric for measuring program success.
8. Offer a course or workshop to help students build the soft skills required for success in college.
9. Brand the program with a unique and clearly identifiable title and logo.