Promising Practices and Common Challenges for the College-Community Connections Program (Identified in the Evaluation of the Pilot Programs)

Promising Practices

- Program design includes adequate planning;
- Expectations for students, staff, and faculty are clearly defined;
- Student participation is voluntary;
- Recruitment of students takes place early in planning process;
- Program addresses a gap in the community organization’s programming;
- Program has “intensive” schedule in which classes are held frequently over a short period (ideally every day);
- Program is delivered by one or a small group of instructors to foster student engagement and continuity in instruction;
- Students participate in an authentic college experience, including challenging college-level coursework, on-campus activities, and interaction with college students;
- Content area is engaging, including culturally and socially relevant themes or topics aligned with student experiences and interests;
- Students participate in coursework that introduces them to skills they will need to succeed in college, such as critical thinking, public speaking, and research skills;
- College instructors whom students can easily relate to, such as young, dynamic professors and/or faculty of color;
- Community organization staff members are actively involved in program classes and/or activities to help increase student engagement and establish bridge to programming within agency;
- College students have an active role in program, serving as mentors and/or instructors; and
- Students are provided opportunities that expose them to experiences and ideas that they do not usually encounter in school or their everyday lives.

Common Challenges

- Inadequate planning time;
- Logistical issues, such as scheduling (different college and high school schedules), communication, and transportation were not worked out;
- Programs competed with other student activities and/or obligations, such as after school activities during the school year and summer work experiences;
- Expectations for students, staff, or faculty about program were not clearly defined and understood;
- Community organization staff turnover;
- Poor student attendance or participation;
- Wide age range of students created programming challenges; and
- Students were not prepared with “soft skills” such as such as coming to class on time and prepared, relating to instructors with respect and attention, or acting appropriately, which impeded class instruction.