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PROGRESS 2015: Supporting students to success

Exciting is the best way to describe how Stark County P-16 educators are supporting students to success.

Editor's Note: Adrienne O'Neill is president of the Stark Education Partnership. She has been with SEP since 2000, and before that was president of a college in Arizona, chair of an educational leadership and a graduate program at several colleges, and served as a superintendent of schools in two New Jersey school districts for 17 years.

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The Stark Education Partnership has been most fortunate to visit many of the schools, colleges and universities and to see the educators in action, or to work on projects with educators who describe new ways to increase student achievement. A few examples follow.

SPARK: A good beginning is known to be essential to success in school. As a part of the Early Childhood Race to the Top preschool grant, we observed the SPARK (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) early-childhood programs at Sandy Valley and Minerva. Similar programs are being conducted in the Alliance, Canton, Canton South, and Massillon school districts. Parent Partners visit the home and work with parents and children using free books and art supplies to be sure that the children begin school with the reading, language and social skills they need to succeed.

Screenings and follow-up services are provided if necessary. Receiving schools are creating transition experiences and every year, SPARK students do better in school than their peers who have not experienced the program.

TECHNOLOGY: Recognizing that the future is electronic learning, students and teachers at many grade levels in all Stark County school districts are using electronic devices with robust curricula as a part of their daily instruction. Straight A Grants in Canton City, Massillon, Minerva, North Canton, Osnaburg, R.G. Drage, and Sandy Valley and the Timken Foundation in Alliance have provided grant dollars to purchase Chromebooks or iPads. These districts and others have also used local funds to purchase these devices. In the next years, such devices can also be purchased using federal e-rate funds because the regulations have changed.

DUAL CREDIT: The number of Stark County students taking college courses while in high school continues to increase. Our recent review of the National Student Tracker data shows that 82.4 percent of the Stark County dual-credit students graduating between 2009 and 2012 subsequently enrolled in college compared to Ohio at 62.7 percent, the nation at 68.2 percent and Stark County's two-year enrollment rate at 73 percent.

This year, more of the dual-credit courses are offered online with a teacher facilitating at the high school while a college professor teaches the course. Advanced Placement and College Career Technical courses also are growing as students pursue their options and possible future careers.

Next year all Stark County colleges and universities will participate in dual credit including Aultman School of Nursing, Kent State Stark, Malone University, Mount Union University, Stark State College, and Walsh University as well as University of Akron in Summit County. The name of the program will change to College Credit Plus, and each school district has posted the requirements for the program on its website. We know that student enrollment numbers are up and in some cases the growth is dramatic. For example, in Massillon City Schools, the number of dual-credit enrollments next year is anticipated to grow two-and-a-half times — from 166 to 420.

COLLEGE COMPLETION: Student success is an emphasis at all of the colleges and universities in this area. Support for students begins when students are in high school and in many cases can be accessed online — one example can be found at the Stark State College website, www.starkstate.edu/admissions.

Using multiple strategies, college staff and faculty continue the support after students enroll to make sure that each student completes a course, program or certificate. As a result, the college completion rates have risen at our two-year and four-year colleges and universities.



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