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Issue: March/April 2014

Community Impact Awards 2014: Stark Education Partnership

By Roxanna Coldiron

Stark Education Partnership is helping the county's schools create a culture of college attainment.



Kenneth Brunner, principal of Canton's Early College High School, has been keeping tabs on his graduates.

He knows what happens to them after they walk across the stage with their diplomas and how well his school is preparing them for college. And he has the Stark Education Partnership to thank.

The organization, which promotes and supports education reform, funded subscriptions to Student Tracker for all 17 Stark County school districts, which has nearly 62,000 students.

The database, used primarily by educational lenders and employers to verify college enrollment, allows Brunner to track students beyond graduation, including who attends college and where, how long it takes them to graduate — even whether they switch majors.

"This helps us to better prepare our current students by looking at what the kids who've gone before them have been able to do," Brunner says. So far, 13,500 Stark County high school graduates have been tracked, and that number will increase by 2,500 to 3,000 annually.

"The state already tracks students who attend college in Ohio," says Adrienne O'Neill, president of Stark Education Partnership, "but the data is only limited to a one-time collection. They aren't tracking over time."

It's creating a culture of college attainment throughout the county. For example, 73 percent of the county's graduates now attend college within two years of graduation. Graduates from Canton's two urban high schools, McKinley and Timken, are attending college at record numbers: 71 and 65 percent, respectively.

There are other benefits as well. Early College High School attracts high-potential but mostly low-income students for dual-credit courses, which allows students to work toward an associate degree while finishing high school. With space for only 100 students, the selection process is competitive. So Early College High School compares middle school test scores and grades of successful graduates with those of potential students to identify the best candidates.

"We use the data from Student Tracker to help us in selecting the right students," Brunner says.

The ability to track over time means that the county and individual schools can recognize trends and measure how successful their programs are in preparing students for future success. For example, educators know that 84 percent of county seniors enrolled in dual-credit courses in high school immediately enroll in college after graduation. The districts have expanded many of their dual-credit programs to include career and technical education courses.

"These kids are getting a heads up on their resumes, networking with business professionals and gaining the skills they need for their careers," Brunner says.


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