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College guides promote post-high school education in local schools

AmeriCorps' Ohio College Guide program directs high school students toward higher education.

While exuberantly hugging Takisha Morgan, Sadie Bell proudly proclaimed the good news that she is within days of graduating from McKinley High School.

Bell, who is preparing to enter the University of Toledo, not only credits Morgan with putting her on the path to post-high school education, but also completing high school.

"She is the biggest helper you could have in this building; if you had a question about ACT (American College Testing), how do you pay college, going on visits," Bell, 18, said. "She was the one that got me to graduate. I couldn't pass my OGT (Ohio Graduation Test)."

Morgan's role at McKinley High School has been fulfilling functions of an AmeriCorps' mentor, known as an Ohio College Guide. She has been one of three such individuals.

Stark Education Partnership, which oversees the Ohio College Guild program in the county, has Bob Huth at Washington High School in Massillon and Che Richardson at Alliance High School.

All three are recent college graduates whose task it is to mentor and guide high school students toward post-high school education, be it traditional college or trade school.

FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

"The college guide works closely with the principals and guidance counselors," Adele Gelb, program officer for Stark Education Partnership, said. "We know that about 20 percent of Stark County adults have a bachelor's degree. But many, many students do not have someone at home who has been through that process. There is a higher need in urban districts."

Those receiving the mentoring are students who in many cases are considered "first generation," which means their parents or guardians did not attend college. Some of the students could be from low- or moderate-income families.

Morgan, recalling her efforts with Bell, said, "I think it was a year-long process. I made sure she was attending classes. I also stay after school and do tutoring. I have met with almost every student that is here at least full-time. I help them transition from high school to college. The first-generation students, their parents may not know the next step to get into college. Although the counselors do a good job, it is kind of hard for them to get the one-on-one time with each student."

Morgan is a recent graduate of University of Mount Union as is Huth. Richardson graduated from Malone University.

The three AmeriCorps' Ohio College Guide workers' stipend is \$12,100 a year.

"We had wonderful feedback from students, principals and guidance counselors," Gelb said.

MIXTURE OF URBAN AND RURAL

Other Ohio cities hosting the mentor program are Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Marietta, Oberlin, Warren, Yellow Springs and Zanesville. These are considered host communities for college access sites.

Within all nine college access sites in the state, there are a total of 70 AmeriCorps Ohio College Guide mentors.

"It is a mix between urban and rural. Most of them are in high schools," said Bridget McFadden of College Now Greater Cleveland, which oversees the program in that city. "We do have a few in middle schools. We all have the same goals."

McFadden guides the program statewide. Funding the AmeriCorps' Ohio College Guide program starts at the national level with the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Funding is routed to this state through the Ohio Commission on Service and Volunteerism, or what is referred to as Serve Ohio.

"The statewide organization trains all of them (Ohio College Guide workers)," Gelb said. "And we add training that is specific to Stark County."

According to statistics from the Lumina Foundation, an Indianapolis-based foundation that promotes expansion of student access to post-high school education, nearly 32 percent of Stark County's adult population aged 25 to 64 have at least an associate degree.

According to the Lumina Foundation, increasing higher education attainment is imperative for Ohio to maintain and enhance its economy and job level.

However, Gelb said the ultimate goal of the AmeriCorps' Ohio College Guide program does not have to be directing a high school senior to a traditional college.



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Takisha Morgan (left), an AmeriCorps' Ohio College Guide participant, discusses academic matters with LaShonda Hill, a McKinley High School student. The Ohio College Guide program places AmeriCorps staffers, who are recent college graduates, in McKinley, Washington High School in Massillon and Alliance High School. The Ohio College Guide personnel mentor students to put them on-track for post-high school education or training. The program is administered locally by Stark Educational Partnership.

“It doesn’t have to be college; education beyond high school,” Gelb said. “It could be the military, it could be a trade school.”

Each of the nine college access sites in Ohio has an educational-promotional program overseeing the Ohio College Guide operations.

“We have 10 AmeriCorps members here who work with students in Cincinnati,” said Jane Keller, chief executive officer and president of Cincinnati Youth Collaborative. “It is an extremely important program for youth and their families to make sure they are ready for college. It is really making sure young students know what is expected of them when they transition to college.”

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