



# NEWSLETTER

## College As A Bridge to High School Graduation

AS LATE AS 1947, A TERMINAL YEAR IN AN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL WAS DEEMED TO BE THE 10<sup>TH</sup> GRADE. A MAJOR STRUCTURAL REFORM STRATEGY BEING ADVOCATED BY PRESIDENT TRUMAN'S COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION WAS THE "6-4-4" PLAN THAT INCLUDED SIX YEARS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, FOUR YEARS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL, AND FOUR YEARS OF HIGH SCHOOL. THE PLAN TO EXTEND HIGH SCHOOL TO INCLUDE GRADES 11-14 WAS VIGOROUSLY DEBATED AMONG EDUCATION REFORMERS AND POLITICIANS ALIKE. IT WAS DURING THIS PERIOD OF REFORM AND DEBATE THAT THE CONCEPT OF "MIDDLE COLLEGE" OR "EARLY COLLEGE" TOOK ITS ROOTS. IN 1964, ELIZABETH HALL ESTABLISHED SIMON'S ROCK EARLY COLLEGE; A RURAL, RESIDENTIAL, INDEPENDENT LIBERAL ARTS INSTITUTION THAT INCLUDED GRADES 11-14. HALL ENVISIONED A STUDENT BODY THAT HAD AVERAGE OR ABOVE-AVERAGE STUDENTS WHO WOULD BENEFIT FROM ACCELERATED OR ENRICHED EDUCATION.

In contrast, during 1971, Janet Lieberman and her colleagues at LaGuardia Community College in New York opened a high school program on the campus of the college that was designed to increase the aspirations and abilities of students with little chance for postsecondary education or who were even at risk of dropping out of school. The idea of putting "at-risk" high school students on a college campus was indeed radical for the time. However, many were beginning to notice that the traditional high school setting was not meeting the needs of a great number of students, particularly those who were likely to drop out. This was certainly evidenced by Robert Havighurst, Professor of Education at the University of Chicago who stated: *"The major failure of American education has been the inability to develop a constructive and satisfying program of education in the broad sense (including work and community service) for the least successful 30 percent of adolescents in the academic*

*school. This will be the main problem in the decade 1970-1980."* (Kopan, 1972, p. 323)

To many, the manifestation of that failure is the prolific rise in the number of alternative schools since the early 1990s. Originally conceptualized as schools with a great deal of flexibility in the structure of the school, the curriculum, and teaching strategies, alternative schools have too often developed into little more than holding pens for students labeled as troublemakers. Even so, the idea of alternative schools serving as a "middle college" program on a college campus has quietly begun to manifest itself across the country.

With that as a foundation, I've asked colleagues who have worked directly with a middle college program, or who have intimate knowledge and understanding of the concept, to offer insights into what is going on around the nation in this area of at-risk intervention and dropout recovery. In this newsletter, you will read the insights of a technical college president who is in



the midst of starting a middle college program on his campus. You will also read articles by the directors of two major middle college programs in Oregon and Michigan that are conceptually the same but operated differently in many ways. Especially interesting is the reflection of a student in one of the programs who believes her educational career and life was positively changed by her enrollment. Also included is a book review, Web links, and other resources for those wishing to learn more about the middle college concept. I hope you enjoy the articles and find them professionally enlightening.

—Terry Cash, Ph.D.  
Guest Editor  
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### Reference

Kopan, A. T. (1972). Robert J. Havighurst: Pursuit of excellence. In H. Walberg & A. T. Kopan (Eds.), *Rethinking urban education* (pp. 317–335). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

# 2005 NDPN Crystal Star Awards of Excellence

Meet the winners of the 2005 Crystal Star Awards of Excellence. Read more about them on our Web site, [www.dropoutprevention.org](http://www.dropoutprevention.org). Our congratulations to all winners!

## Program Winners

### Education Counts—ZerO

**Guilford, Guilford County Schools, Greensboro, NC.** Guilford County has a comprehensive plan that starts with preschool and addresses literacy, student achievement, and professional development. Students have the choice of attending the innovative Early and Middle College or a variety of magnet schools. Each high school has a dropout prevention specialist.

**School for Integrated Academics and Technologies (SIATech) Charter School, Vista, CA.** The mission of

SIATech is to provide high school students who have dropped out of the traditional education system and are now enrolled in the Federal Job Corps Program, the opportunity to complete their high school education and to break the cycle of poverty. The 15 sites of SIATech deliver computer-based instruction with individualized education plans that are specifically designed to meet the needs of a diverse student population.

**Sinclair Community College Fast Forward Center, Dayton, OH,** was established in 2001 to develop and maintain a comprehensive network of alternative schools and programs for youth ages 15-21 who have previously dropped out or are not regularly attending high school. Its goal is to return the youth to high school, help them achieve proficiency, earn a high school diploma, and have a positive placement upon graduation.

## Individual Winners

**Edward Bates,** Director of Positive Alternative Student Services (PASS), Lake County Regional Office of Education, Grayslake, IL, has worked with high-risk youth for over 30 years, focusing primarily on the prevention and elimination of truancy. He has received national recognition as the administrator of STEP (Summer Training and Education Program), which provides part-time educational and employment opportunities for 14- and 15-year-old youth.

**Katherine Merritt,** Outreach Consultant, Howard School, Ontario-Montclair School District, Montclair, CA, created a support program for students who have difficulty making friends. She serves as a resource to community agencies and coordinates programs which provide food, uniforms, clothing, and shoes to students. She has credentials in Pupil Personnel Services, general education, and special education; is a trained counselor and has completed the Dropout Prevention Specialist (DPS) Program. Ms. Merritt has been a preschool teacher, a special

education resource specialist, and a middle school counselor.

**Franklin, P. Schargel,** Consultant and Author, Albuquerque, NM. His career spans 33 years of classroom teaching and eight years of supervision and administration as Assistant Principal. He has presented countless workshops for educational, community, and business groups throughout the United States, Europe, Canada, and Latin America. He is the author of several highly regarded books on dropout prevention and has a regular monthly Internet column at [www.guidancechannel.com](http://www.guidancechannel.com) as well as a quarterly column in *Quality Education*.

## Students With Disabilities Winners—Program Winner

**Moss Point High School Entrepreneurship Program, Moss Point School District, Moss Point, MS,** was implemented in 2001-2002. The goal of the program is to promote attendance, prevent dropouts, and teach job skills along with academics for students with disabilities in grades 9-12. There are three components of the program: Tiger Print Class produces printed materials; Embroidery Class decorates a variety of items; and Tiger Den Laundry Service provides laundry services. Schools, students, staff, parents, and community members use the services provided by these three units.

## Individual Winner

**Jose Blackorby,** Ph.D., Associate Center Director, SRI's Center for Education and Human Services, Menlo Park, CA, has worked on issues related to outcomes for students with disabilities for his entire professional career and has 15 years of experience in policy-relevant research and quantitative and qualitative data analysis. He is currently the Co-Director of the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS), a five-year national longitudinal study of 11,500 students receiving special education services.



National  
Dropout Prevention  
Center/Network

## NEWSLETTER

The *National Dropout Prevention Newsletter* is published quarterly by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. Your comments are always welcome. Please address mail to:

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# Network Notes

## 2005 NDPN Distinguished Leadership Award

■ We congratulate **M. Buell Snyder**, Principal, Jefferson County High School, Louisville, KY, the 2005 recipient of the Network's Distinguished



Leadership Award. Over the years, he has made exemplary contributions to the Network and its members, as well as to his students. Having attended and presented workshops at every conference for over 10 years and hosted dozens of visits by Network members to his school, Mr. Snyder served as a host for the 2004 Effective Strategies Institute, sponsored by the Network and held in Louisville, KY, in 2004.

Mr. Snyder has worked in the school system for 40 years. His creativity and ingenuity have led to the development of many successful programs for high-risk students: the Whitney Young Job Corp Center, administering the WIN program, developing refugee camps for the United States State Department, directing numerous JTPA programs, supervising GED/literacy programs for Adult Education, and providing the leadership in the development of three alternative schools—Jefferson County High School, Liberty High School, and JCPSeSchool. After the first year of implementation, the District's dropout rate was reduced by 30% due to transfers into Jefferson County High School. The high school has been replicated by over 250 school districts in more than 27 states.

Over 6,000 at-risk students have graduated from JCHS since its inception. Nearly 8,000 students per year are taking eSchool courses, some as far away as Japan. He is often quoted as saying, "The students didn't become at risk overnight, and so it will take us longer than a day to

get them back on the right track. We've got to keep trying and give them a chance to turn around."

## 17th Annual Conference

■ More than 1,900 educators, community leaders, and policy-makers gathered in Santa Clara, CA, for the 17th Annual National Dropout Prevention Conference, sponsored by the National Dropout Prevention Center, the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities at Clemson University, and EduAlliance of Santa Cruz, CA. Participants were inspired, informed, and encouraged by more than 100 sessions that focused on teaching strategies, violence prevention, service-learning, motivation, resiliency, diversity, humor, and personal responsibility. The conference theme, *Ready to Learn: Helping Students Survive and Thrive*, helped participants realize that academic rigor and relevance of curriculum alone are not enough to raise test scores. When these are combined with interventions that build relationships with the students, the synergy produces improved yearly progress (AYP) in all subgroups.

## At-Risk Youth National FORUM

■ Our next professional development event is the At-Risk Youth National FORUM at Myrtle Beach, SC. You now must register online. The National Dropout Prevention Network has converted to an online registration system for all upcoming conferences. This system will allow individuals to submit a request to present or to register online for all upcoming conferences and institutes. You will enter the registration area through the Center's Web site at [www.dropoutprevention.org](http://www.dropoutprevention.org).

## NDPC-SD News

■ As part of an effort to synthesize and translate research examining effective practices in dropout prevention for students with disabili-

ties, the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD), in partnership with the What Works in Transition Systematic Review Project at Colorado State University, has released the following new document enclosed in this mailing: *Effective Interventions in Dropout Prevention: A Practice Brief for Educators "Cognitive Behavioral Interventions: An Effective Approach to Help Students with Disabilities Stay in School"* (Riccomini, Bost, Katsiyannis, & Zhang, 2005). This practice guide, based on the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) supported work by the Promoting What Works Synthesis Center, translates research evidence into educational practice and provides educators with the understanding and technical information to develop and implement cognitive-behavioral interventions in classroom settings that reduce aggressive behaviors in students.

## Our Guest Editor

■ Terry Cash is the Assistant Director of the NDPC, College of Health, Education, and Human Development,



Clemson University. Dr. Cash's responsibilities include research, grant writing, and program evaluation for a wide range of intervention strategies designed for youth at risk of school failure.

Dr. Cash has over two decades of experience as a teacher, principal, and district level administrator in North and South Carolina. He has developed and implemented multiple programs in school districts across both states that were designed to address the needs of students most at risk of dropping out of school. Dr. Cash recently co-authored *Alternative Schools: Best Practices for Development and Evaluation* in the NDPC/N Effective Strategies series.

# Program Profile

## Mott Middle College

by Chery S. Wagonlander

Educators everywhere have long struggled to keep students interested in learning. Every day thousands of students are seriously disengaged in learning for a myriad of reasons. Mott Middle College, an alternative high school on the campus of Mott Community College in Flint, Michigan, was created to address the needs of those bright, young students who become disengaged, disenchanted, and are ultimately on the road to disappearing.

Although Mott Middle College offers its students a full, general high school education, it is significantly different from traditional high schools. The hallmarks of its success with students whom others have given up on are its innovative curriculum and an instructional model stressing that the emotional well-being of students is integral to whether they are ready to learn. As a practical matter, this means teachers are advisers first, and purveyors of content second. We try to get our students intensive care in counseling and understanding them psychologically, for we know that if you are not well physically, if you are not well

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*We believe the key to success for our students is that they all have a desire to start fresh, to be in a different environment so they can do better.*

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mentally, if you are not well in what you can do cognitively, how could you be happy? Why would you be engaged?

The foundation for Mott Middle College was laid in 1988 with a planning grant from the Mott Foundation to Mott Community College to work with the Flint Community Schools and the Genesee County Intermediate School District to explore dropout prevention programs and to increase the number of nontraditional students pursuing higher education.

Three years later, with the help of two Foundation grants totaling \$274,164, Mott Middle College was launched as the nation's first multi-district middle college high school. Any student from the county's 21

school districts could be considered for enrollment. Several years later, eligibility expanded to students who live in any county adjacent to Genesee County. With Foundation support totaling \$1,542,983 since its inception, Mott Middle College has since become a model for other school districts grappling with the problem of keeping students in school.

In 2003, Mott Middle College was awarded a \$142,000 grant from the Gates Foundation, allowing students to stay a 13<sup>th</sup> year in high school. Under this program, called *Excel*, students will graduate with a diploma and will have completed a minimum of three college classes up to earning an associate's degree from Mott Community College. As a middle college with an early-college component, Mott Middle College is now a replication site for both early colleges and middle-college high schools.

We believe the key to success for our students is that they all have a desire to start fresh, to be in a different environment so they can do better. That is the strength of our program. Student focus groups are one of the most relevant features of our school. It's not like therapy but more like belonging to a family. When it's done right, it's one of the most cohesive things that brings our school together. In the final analysis, our goal with students is to make them "work-ready and education-hungry" and to help them understand that you never get finished with your training or learning.

—Chery S. Wagonlander, Ed.D.  
Principal, Mott Middle College  
Flint, Michigan



# Program Profile

## Gateway to College: A Second Chance for Academic Success

by Laurel Dukehart

High school graduation, and the thrill of celebrating this important rite of passage with cap, gown, and proud family members, is a wonderful memory. Completing high school opens doors to new opportunities and a future of promise. Tragically, about one-third of America's young people do not achieve this goal. By dropping out of high school, they are missing out on more than memories—without a diploma, most are doomed to a future of low wages, shut out of postsecondary education and advancement. What options exist to combat this national crisis?

Gateway to College offers one solution that is working for students in Portland, Oregon, and it is now being replicated in nine other cities around the country. Gateway to College, developed at Portland Community College (PCC), serves youth 16 to 20 years old who have dropped out of school or are on the verge of dropping out. Students simultaneously earn college credits while completing their high school diploma requirements in the college setting. Funded through innovative partnerships between community colleges and their school district partners, Gateway to College pays for tuition and books, thereby offering former dropouts a scholarship to attend college. In addition, students receive wraparound support from resource specialists who act as coaches, advisors, and mentors. All of this works to motivate students who were not successful in a traditional high school environment.

Young people drop out of school for many reasons, but a surprising number say that they left high school because they needed to work, or because they felt that they didn't fit in. A surprising number drop out of multiple high schools before giving

up. Gateway to College offers a real second chance for success. The adult learning environment is often ideal for students who did not succeed in the comprehensive high school setting. Community colleges offer flexibility; individualized attention; scaffolded developmental curriculum; and a mature, diverse environment different from the social pressures of high schools.

In their first term in Gateway to College, students learn in a small cohort. The cohort experience builds their academic and personal skills, while acclimating students to the college environment. Students take reading, writing, and math, as well as a college skills course to learn how to take effective notes, study for tests, and juggle school, work, and family life. Students learn how to succeed and gain confidence under the guidance of a caring team of instructors and support staff. After successfully completing the cohort, students take college courses with the general student population. Because all classes are dual credit, Gateway to College is cost effective.

As a national partner in the Early College High School Initiative, Portland Community College will

select 17 sites to replicate the Gateway to College program. The Early College High School Initiative and PCC's replication project are funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, in partnership with Carnegie Corporation of New York, Ford Foundation, and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. So far, nine sites have received planning and startup grants; five are open and serving students, and four colleges are in training with PCC and will open to students in the fall of 2006. Eight additional colleges will be selected over the next two years, creating a national network of Gateway to College partners who are making a difference in 17 U.S. cities.

For more information on the Gateway to College model and the replication, please visit [www.gatewaytocollege.org](http://www.gatewaytocollege.org). Information about the Early College High School Initiative is available at [www.earlycolleges.org](http://www.earlycolleges.org).

—Laurel Dukehart  
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# Book Review

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*Access to Success in the Urban High School: The Middle College Movement.* Harold S. Wechsler. 2001. Teachers College Press: New York. [ISBN No. 0-8077-4052-7]

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In *Access to Success in the Urban High School: The Middle College Movement*, Dr. Harold Wechsler explores the concept of “middle college” as an effective intervention for students commonly termed as being “at risk” of school failure and dropping out. To help readers understand the theory and model, Wechsler describes in detail a somewhat historical account of the early development of the Middle College High School at LaGuardia Community College in Queens, New York, through its design, growth, and replication.

The term “middle college” conjures up a myriad of definitions to educators and noneducators alike. In this book, Wechsler provides no clear-cut definition of exactly what middle college is, but rather relates the key curricular and organizational features of an alternative high school on a college campus for late adolescents that “would offer a flexible, multidisciplinary, relevant program of studies designed to heighten student interest in education and to permit close articulation between the school’s secondary and collegiate components” (pg. 33). A more concise definition might describe the concept of middle college as an integration of at-risk high school students with college students from similar backgrounds.

The book is a wonderful account of the early development of Middle College High School and would be an interesting read for those not familiar with the middle college concept. It provides a wonderful philosophical construct for the development of the middle college movement, along with examples of seven geographically dispersed program replications across the nation. It helps to fill the void pertaining to the lack of literature available on the topic. However, this book should not be construed as a primer for a school district or community looking for a template to develop a middle college program. It is long on detail about the Middle College High School at LaGuardia Community College, but lacks substance as a tome on program development.

Even considering the limitations noted above, the text should be considered a “must read” for those contemplating the development of a middle college program. *Access to Success in the Urban High School: The Middle College Movement* points out the problems and opportunities that come with adapting innovations aimed at the thousands of bright students who become disenfranchised, disengaged, and ultimately disappear from our schools each day.

—Terry Cash, Ph.D., National Dropout Prevention Center  
Clemson University, [tcash@clemson.edu](mailto:tcash@clemson.edu)

## Also Recommended:

*The Early College High School Initiative “At a Glance”*

This two-page fact sheet provides an up-to-date profile of the initiative, with a map of schools, data on the number of schools and students, and other key information.

*Add and Subtract: Dual Enrollment as a State Strategy to Increase Postsecondary Success for Underrepresented Students*

This policy primer for states provides an overview of dual enrollment and a rationale for its expansion and guidelines (including funding models) for states wishing to implement dual enrollment for a wider range of students. Brief case studies highlight substantial dual enrollment programs that serve a wide range of students and offer lessons for an expanded mission for dual enrollment.

The above articles are available in PDF format from  
[www.earlycolleges.org/Library.html](http://www.earlycolleges.org/Library.html)

# Resources

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## The Middle College National Consortium

The Consortium provides ongoing technical assistance and support to both new and established middle college high schools as they implement educational reforms and engage in professional activities designed to help underperforming students meet high academic standards.

[www.laguardia.edu/mcnc/](http://www.laguardia.edu/mcnc/)

## Middle College Foundation

The Middle College Foundation offers scholarships for graduating seniors that have shown outstanding academic achievements and assisted in the mission of their Middle College program and two-year college.

[www.middlecollegefoundation.org/](http://www.middlecollegefoundation.org/)

## Early College High School Initiative

The Plato Learning Corporation has developed a comprehensive PowerPoint on the middle college initiative, “Bridging the Gap Between Secondary and Post-Secondary,” through research completed by The Mortenson Research Center on Public Policy. The PowerPoint includes an overview of what early college high school is, the initiative scale and scope, and middle college site information.

[www.plato.com/community/edtech/speakers.asp](http://www.plato.com/community/edtech/speakers.asp)

# Events

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**Feb. 20-22, 2006 Myrtle Beach, SC**  
**At-Risk Youth National FORUM,**  
***Increasing the Graduation Rate for All Students***

[www.dropoutprevention.org](http://www.dropoutprevention.org)

**March 22-25, 2006 Philadelphia, PA**  
**National Service-Learning Conference, *We the People***

[www.nylc.org](http://www.nylc.org)

**April 2-4, 2006 Des Moines, IA**  
**2006 Effective Strategies Institute,**  
***Alternative Programs for Everyone: Pathways for Success***

[www.dropoutprevention.org](http://www.dropoutprevention.org)

# Changing Lives: One Student at a Time

by Leah Gibson (Gateway to College student)

Gateway to College students face many challenges. They are English Language Learners, teen parents, former gang members, foster youth, and young people who have struggled with homelessness and substance abuse. Many Gateway students work full time. Far too few live with supportive family members who can help them achieve their educational goals. Portland Community College (PCC) developed Gateway to College to give hope and real skills to students who have felt hopeless about their education. Thanks to Gateway to College, many young lives are changing. Students who had little chance of even graduating from high school are earning their diplomas and succeeding in college. They are pursuing four-year degrees and challenging careers. In short, they are reinventing themselves for their future.

Leah Gibson, age 20, is a graduate of Gateway to College at PCC. Leah's story is a compelling example of the kinds of problems young people face, and the things they can accomplish with support and a second chance. Leah earned her diploma at PCC in 2004, has completed the requirements for an associate of science degree, and is nearly finished with her Oregon Arts Transfer degree from PCC with a 3.4 grade point average. Leah, a member of the Oglala-Lakota Tribe, helped start a PCC club for Native Americans in 2003, and in 2004, she started a PCC chapter of the Oregon Students of Color Coalition. She is currently student body president at PCC's Cascade Campus.

This success didn't come easy. Excerpts from her address to the Gateway to College Peer Learning Conference in July of 2005 tell her story.

*Throughout my childhood, I had always had some anxiety about school and associating with my peers. In middle school, I began to see a*

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*Finally, I had found a school program that both encouraged my independence and was challenging enough to hold my attention.*

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*therapist for my depression and anxiety. I was acting out, both at school and at home. In addition to normal teenage behavior, I was cutting my arms regularly, getting into major trouble at school, drinking and smoking, and had begun to develop an eating disorder. In high school, things got worse. I started off in the Honors Program, but dropped out early in the first year. I also dropped out of soccer and cross-country because I was smoking and partying too much. I began taking acid and speed, and was smoking pot and drinking heavily on a regular basis. At home I was driving my family crazy, and I left for four months. I didn't want to give up my drugs and partying.*

*I remember the night that made me change my perspective on my life. I was trying to find somewhere to sleep and ended up underneath the awning of a theater downtown. I read the posters about the performances and peered through the windows into the darkened theater. I remembered how much I loved being in shows when I was a girl, and how I had always wanted to act professionally as an adult. I was sober that night, and coming down off some high, so I got really depressed, realizing the path that I was taking was leading me nowhere.*

*Slowly, I began to retake control of my life. I moved in with my grandparents for a while, went to rehab, and tried several more schools before I began to make progress. It took me a long time to get better.*

*What really changed my perspective on education was getting into the*

*Gateway to College program at PCC. Finally, I had found a school program that both encouraged my independence and was challenging enough to hold my attention. The counselors and teachers made it clear to me that being a part of the program and doing well in it was up to me. They never forced me to do anything I didn't want to, but they let me know that I would be missing out on an awesome opportunity to get back on track if I didn't do the work. I just couldn't pass up the chance to get my high school diploma and most of my credits for my associate's degree for free!*

In Gateway to College, Leah received support and encouragement, including encouragement to get involved in college life. She followed her dream and became involved in theater and film at PCC. Through her work with the United Tribes Club, she learned about the effects of drugs and alcohol on Native people. She continued to struggle with substance abuse for a time, but found her personal solution by becoming involved with the ceremonies and sweat lodges of her Native culture. She says getting in touch with her spirituality helped her make a commitment to sobriety. While telling her story at the conference, Leah shared her anxiety about speaking in front of groups. She said:

*I do this with the hope that my story will inspire people and motivate them to continue reaching out to students like me. Whether you realize it or not, your support is absolutely essential for your students to succeed. Sometimes it may not seem that way. Sometimes we can be cranky and bossy and frustrated with you. But please know how much your efforts mean to us, as well as what you are teaching us. You are amazing role models.*

When the new Gateway to College partners asked Leah for her advice about starting similar programs around the country, Leah said, "Just do it! Lots of people need this kind of program!"

# Viewpoint

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There are some who say community colleges should stop trying to be “all things to all people.” They say record enrollments and declining state support are clear indicators that it’s time to rein in the mission. Maybe so, but community colleges must stay true to the fact that they are first and foremost part of the community. Being responsive to the needs of the service region has always been central to the mission of community colleges. And when the community has a problem, it’s time to step up.

One of the problems we face in our community, as do many communities throughout the nation, is the number of young people who drop out of high school. While these dropouts suffer the consequences personally and financially, their actions also impact the economic vitality of our communities. Dropping out of school may be a personal decision, but it has public consequences.

Tri-County Technical College’s governing board decided unanimously about two years ago that it was time to step up and be part of the solution. Their challenge to me and other college leaders was to find a proactive response that fit the mission and character of the institution.

We quickly learned that our partner districts had many programs in place to help keep kids engaged in learning and on track to graduation. The challenge was to find a role for the college that didn’t duplicate their efforts, something unique that would be a “value added” contribution.

“When the pupil is ready, the teacher will come,” according to an old Chinese proverb. In our case, the “teacher” has been Portland Community College’s nationally recognized Gateway to College program for at-risk/dropout youth. In this approach to the middle college/early college high school concept, at-risk youth who have not responded to school-based programs have a real second chance to succeed—but this time in a college learning environment.

At first the approach may seem counterintuitive. How can dropouts handle college if they can’t handle high school? How can academically and emotionally fragile students earn a high school diploma and a college credential at the same time? The answers are simultaneously simple and complex, and revolve around specialized student support coupled with scaffolded academic experiences leading to success. Suffice it to say that

the understanding for this approach is ingrained in the community college psyche. After all, our mission has always taken us in the direction of making winners of ordinary people. We inherently understand the power of a second chance. We also have the institutional flexibility to meet a wide variety of needs.

The Gateway to College program provides us with the opportunity to take our service mission to a new level. I am confident that the result will strengthen the institution and heighten our contribution to local communities. Most importantly, our efforts will improve the lives of young people who are a part of our community, and who deserve a second chance.

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—Ronnie L. Booth, Ph.D., President  
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The purpose of Viewpoint is to allow professionals to express their opinions about issues related to dropout prevention. The opinions expressed by these authors do not necessarily reflect those of the National Dropout Prevention Network.



National Dropout Prevention Center/Network

## NEWSLETTER

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