

CHICAGO'S SARAH E. GOODE STEM ACADEMY ENSURES EARLY COLLEGE SUCCESS

At the Sarah E. Goode STEM Academy on Chicago's Southwest side, college courses are well under way. The school and its partners, the Chicago Public Schools, Richard J. Daley College and the IBM Corporation, have learned through experience that early access to college must be provided in tandem with strong structures and supports. With these in place, young students have the best chance of succeeding in the college environment.

School: Sarah E. Goode STEM Academy

Partners: Chicago Public Schools, City Colleges of Chicago, Richard J. Daley College, IBM Corporation

Launch: September 2012

Standout Fact: Close to 200 students will be enrolled in college courses by spring 2015

THE CHALLENGE

In early 2014, 100 Goode tenth-graders (out of a class of 250) became eligible for their first college math class. Achieving this milestone was significant for the students. They not only were required to pass the Compass College Placement Exam, they also needed to have a minimum grade point average of 2.5 in their high school coursework and a 90 percent school attendance rate.

Good math teacher Kyle Birch had proudly helped his students achieve these rigorous college benchmarks. Still, he knew that his job was not done. As students began their college coursework, Kyle and Goode's other math teachers began to see student grades and class work and recognized that a group of 15 students enrolled in college level Pre-Calculus were struggling. The teachers reached out to both Michael Crawford, the Dean of Instruction at Daley, and Professor Abolhassan Taghavy, the students' pre-calculus professor, to discuss how to address the issue.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE FACULTY

While collaboration and communication between Daley college faculty and Goode teachers already had been under way, they understood that their communication needed to be strengthened to help students make a smoother transition from high school to college coursework.

As a result, Goode and Daley faculty began meeting on a bi-weekly basis to review student data and implement targeted strategies to support struggling students. "The meetings shed light on how to align college and high school expectations and how to better prepare students for the college setting," says Birch.

These meetings also helped bridge misconceptions between the two schools. "When students first started college courses, we had the impression that students weren't getting enough support from the college," recalls Birch. "But after we began meeting with the professor and the Dean of Instruction, we understood that they were holding very high expectations for students and were willing to help them, but they also needed our support as well."

Birch and the other Goode teachers learned that for students to thrive in the less-structured college environment, they needed to be able to show initiative and self-advocate – ask for and seek help when they needed it.

In response, the teachers implemented a range of strategies that required the two institutions to work together in new ways. “We have the advantage of teaching students how to succeed in college while they are still in high school,” says Birch. “The risk is lower, and the safety net is bigger.”

Daley College students began tutoring struggling students on Goode’s campus during the high school students’ required College Support class. At the same time, Goode staff encouraged students to attend Professor Taghavy’s office hours and request one-on-one meetings with him if they did not understand a concept. Taghavy also provided Birch and the math team at Goode with quizzes and coursework that he had given in the past so that the Goode team could support and re-teach concepts during the College Support class.

Staff and faculty continued to meet until students took their final exams that semester. By the end of the semester, 11 of the 15 students had passed the class with a C or better. While the success rate was not 100%, it was clear that the custom interventions had worked for many of the students. It has also meant that this aspect of the collaboration will be embedded in the partnership.

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