



MMEP Research Report to Identify Mechanisms to Drive Needed Change

Jermaine played to his strengths and chose transforming policy; Nadine expressed interest in answering the question of who are Minnesota's students of color and Stacey agreed to take the lead in terms of defining what key statements could be made about the level of academic achievement among students of color in the state.

The first three installments of the *State of Students of Color* report series (2001, 2004, and 2006) have focused on collecting and distilling academic achievement data in order to tell the story of students of color. To date the reports have been well-received and endorsed by groups such as Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MNSCU), the Organizing Apprenticeship Project (OAP) and Growth and Justice, and cited by Citizens League and MN2020.

In addition to the well-executed research and thoughtful analysis that has become a hallmark of this report series, the upcoming edition will also specifically identify necessary changes to be made. Drawing on the collective education and experience of its members, the Collaborative will recommend public policies that if adopted would lead to increased academic achievement for students of color.

According to Executive Director Carlos Mariani Rosa, "We see this as a natural evolution of the report series, and the organization as a whole; echoing the sentiment of Elona Street-Stewart, our Board chair, we intend to avoid answering the call to describe the achievement gap problem, and instead will set the terms for necessary change."

*Jermaine, Nadine, and Stacey are just three of the members of the Research Collaborative assembled by MMEP. Comprised of faculty and staff members of Partner institutions, various minority councils, and several nonprofit organizations the Research Collaborative is responsible for producing the upcoming edition of the *State of Students of Color & American Indian Students* report series.*

The majority of the research management duties have been overseen by Manuel Barrera, Ph.D., hired last fall to serve as Director of Research Consultant. In his own words, "I have admired the work of MMEP for many years and when Carlos announced the opportunity to aid in developing MMEP's research agenda, I literally 'jumped' at the chance to be considered. ...I can say my expectations for this work have been confirmed. I feel especially fortunate to...work with the excellent scholars, advocates, and wonderful staff associated with MMEP." Manuel is also a research associate and staff member of the National Center on Educational Outcomes where he has served as co-primary investigator on several federally funded research projects examining effective instruction and assessment of English language learners with learning-related disabilities. He received his Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education in 1997 from Pennsylvania State University.

Drawing on his 20 years of experience effecting improved educational outcomes for diverse learners of color, Manuel has convened regular research meetings over the last eight-to-nine months. Since its incep-

tion MMEP has used a collaborative model with great success. Staying true-to-form the organization decided to assemble a "coalition of the willing" rather than hiring a panel of paid researchers. Collaboration by its very nature is inclusive of multiple viewpoints, and helps MMEP to ensure communities of color have a sense of ownership and empowerment in crafting solutions necessary to allow students of color and American Indian students to succeed academically.

A shared sense of purpose and ownership can also lead to new paths of inquiry as it did in the case of research team member and MMEP Board member Robert Poch who agreed to oversee two research projects that very much align with the mission of MMEP and its initiative, Minnesota College Access Network (MCAN).

A considerable project to tackle on its face but this time around MMEP would ask more from their research team. In addition to collecting and synthesizing academic achievement data, researchers were also asked to craft policy recommendations based on the findings of their report. While it is true that staff and research members have experience crafting public policy, it

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From the Director's Chair...

We know some young students of color are “checking out” of school way before they hit high school, while some are physically unaccounted for, many continue to show up in class but are disengaged academically. We suspect the reasons why, but can't substantiate those with hard data nor with analysis. When we seek action we are told to provide more money for our K-12 schools. While not hostile to that, a feeling that our deepest concerns will still not be addressed exists, in this case, the question of what lies behind students of color “checking out” early.

This scenario speaks to the need for students-of-color-specific-research in our state. How can we better educate when we don't collect data specific to emerging realities? Availability, appropriateness and access of data become important issues in obtaining this information. Availability,

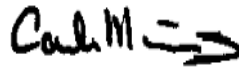
how does the currently collected data inform us? Appropriateness, can the data collected inform us and if not, what data do we need to collect? Access, once collected can the data be readily used by all, especially by those communities most affected?

As policy questions become more “non-traditional”- that is, more reflective of perspectives rooted in communities whose realities have not shaped traditional research methodologies – they challenge us to search more quantitative and qualitative information. Why not survey 5th grade African American boys about their relationships with teachers? Why not document the instances of career discussions promoted by educators for American Indian girls in 6th grade? Why not put a figure on the aspirations of undocumented Latino boys in 9th grade? Why not learn how schools are aligned with the

involvement of Hmong parents in shaping the behavior of their 3rd grade children?

These are the questions that go beyond the data collected on standardized test results, beyond those mandated by state laws, and as required for public appropriations. These better inform us of the dynamics involved in having a successful education system for a racially, culturally, linguistically diverse student body in a society still working its way out of unequal opportunities and unequal appreciation based on race and ethnicity.

As we prepare our 2009 *State of Students of Color & American Indian Students* Report, we hope to drive a broad public commitment to add these relevant questions to the body of knowledge needed to provide powerful learning environments for all students of color in Minnesota. ■



Carlos Mariani-Rosa
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Register Today @ www.mmap.net

State of Students of Color Conference

Early-Bird rates effective until Oct. 15

Members: \$100 Non-members: \$115.00

November 6, 2008

Thanks to new and renewing members*

Support Level: \$10-\$99

Vanessa Abanu
Jill Bromenschenkel
Lynn Deiman
Terry Green
Ruth Leathers
Tim Price
Jill Stever-Zeitlin
Terrina White-Vassar

Support Level: \$100-\$249

Yusef Mgeni, Saint Paul Public Schools
Chosen to Achieve, Saint Paul Public Schools
Lakeville Area Public Schools
Minnesota State Patrol High School Camp
Rochester Public Schools
West 7th Community Center

Support Level: \$250-above

Alexandria Technical College
Anoka Ramsey Community College
Minnesota State University, Mankato

*Mar. 13-July 4, 2008

SYNERGY

A quarterly publication of Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, Inc. (MMEP).

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MMEP is a nonprofit collaborative, founded in 1987, that seeks to increase the success of Minnesota students of color in Minnesota schools, colleges, and universities.

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Mona Miller Harris, program director
Caren Custer, office administrator

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'08 Conference Update: Are You Registered to Attend?

It seems to be a recurring theme this issue to talk about the many activities that have filled our summer days, and the MMEP Conference Committee is no exception. We have been hard at work securing a venue for our fall conference and soliciting, reviewing, and choosing conference breakout sessions.

This work has been accomplished thanks to: **Vanessa Abanu**, University of Minnesota; **Diane Cowdery**, Pacific Educational Group, Inc.; **Mary Lou Dresbach**, Minnesota Office of Higher Education; **Danielle Grant**, Minneapolis Public Schools; **Stacey Gray-Akyea**, Saint Paul Pub-

lic Schools; **Kathy Griebel**, East Metro Integration District (EMID); **Nadine Haley**, Metropolitan State University; **Mike Lopez**, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities; **Luis Ortega**, Minneapolis Public Schools; **Ariana Ortega-Castrellon**, University of Minnesota Alumna; and **Tex Ostvig**, University of Minnesota.

Be sure to visit us online at www.mmep.net to keep up-to-date about all the conference details. Oh, and do not forget to register early!■

Caren Custer
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Strong Leadership Compels ASIC Forward on its Own

Convening and collaborating are two strengths of the MMEP model. For the past several years MMEP has convened the After School Intervention Collaborative (ASIC), a group of out-of-school-time programs whose common thread was that they have received funding from Travelers. The group was actually created based on a report completed for the St. Paul Companies (now Travelers) in which these programs articulated a need for "greater coordination for the purpose of increasing their capacity to serve students."

This model of convening has created a group that is ready to be self-lead – MMEP will no longer be the convener. Several factors make this the perfect time for MMEP to step back from the leadership role:
*The leadership within the collaborative is strong.
*Aligning with the Mayor's

Second Shift initiative along with other out-of-school-time collaboratives in the city makes sense for this group.

*The connection between ASIC and the St. Paul Public Schools has been strengthened – a long-term goal of the group.

*Networking partnerships have developed that will continue to serve students

ASIC represents all forms of out-of-school-time programs from shelter care to programs with a specific link to a particular school; serving preschool – high school age students; staffed by paid staff or mostly volunteers; and those that rely on a specific interest to link mentors to students. Perhaps the strength of the group has been in the diversity. For a list of programs in ASIC, go to: www.mmep.net

MMEP is looking for a few good men and women and nonprofit organizations and postsecondary institutions and businesses and...

The Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, Inc. (MMEP) is funded in part by Individuals, Nonprofit Organizations, and Educational Institutions committed to educational equity for Minnesota's human capital, our children.

There's always room at our table, join us today!



Minnesota
Minority
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For membership details please contact Caren Custer at 651.645.7400 x 200 or ccuster@mmep.net

- In Recognition...
MMEP Partners
Brooklyn Center Schools
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Securian Foundation
State Farm Insurance
James R. Thorpe Foundation
Travelers Foundation
University of Minnesota
The Winston R. and Maxine H. Wallin Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation

and click on "Convening."

The work of MMEP continues; watch for:

*The State of Students of Color & American Indian Students Conference

*New resources from the African American Male Education Advisory

*The 20th Anniversary Academic Enrichment Guide

*The restoration of a new and changed Institute for Multicultural Connection in the summer of 2009 in partnership with Metropolitan State University.

*The Gates Millennium and Page Education Foundation Scholarship event, fall 2008.■

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Organizing Apprenticeship Project

Mac undergrad serves as research intern

MMEP is proud to welcome Livia Martini as our summer 2008 research intern. Livia is an undergraduate student attending nearby Macalester College where she is pursuing an International Studies major, and Political Science minor with a Human Rights Concentration.

Livia's internship and volunteer experiences include tutoring teenagers in order to keep them in school and on-track to graduate; assisting in cultural shows; and collecting and compiling hours of oral narratives for an oral history project. Livia stated her interest in this internship position grew out of her belief that, "A standard of education is a human rights

entitlement and because I believe MMEP works towards that standard."

While at MMEP, Livia will be responsible for creating special reports using qualitative data gathered through a combination of interviews, research, and focus groups. The focus groups will be comprised of school leaders, community members, students of color and their parents and guardians.

Her work will supplement the *2009 State of Students of Color and American Indian Students* report. ■

The funding for this internship was awarded by the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs (HECUA).

Continued from front cover

is the first time that MMEP as an organization will publish and then publicly push for the adoption of a set of recommendations.

So a stone's throw away from MMEP, Bob and his research students from the Postsecondary Education Research Institute (PERI) at the University of Minnesota got to work. Last year, Fritz Vandover under Bob Poch's supervision completed an extensive literature review on social marketing in postsecondary education.

Thanks to the en masse retirements of the baby boomer generation the demand for college graduates in the workforce is fierce and will only increase in urgency during future years. But while four out of five high school graduates from upper income households attend college, students from low-income households, many of them ethnic minorities or first-generation college students, are much less likely to access higher education. According to the executive summary prepared by Fritz this trend is a cause for concern because by 2014 ethnic minorities will represent 40 percent of graduating high school seniors.

One of the questions that inspired the social marketing research was, "If low-income and minority students are becoming a larger share of the student market, why are they not applying for and enrolling in college at a commensurate rate?" One of the ways to begin answering this question is to better "understand how minority and low-income parents and students perceive higher education and the process of successfully getting into and through college" because without that understanding colleges and universities will be ill-prepared to increase enrollment in these population subgroups.

Of course the members of the research team expect gentle, and perhaps not so gentle, pushback from the community about the recommendations. A certain level of tension will always be present whenever large institutions are asked to make changes, but the expectation is that over time systems can evolve to be inclusive of all constituents served.

Another topic being studied by PERI student Chiao-Ling (Claire) Chien is the issue of financing K-12 education and how funding affects the curriculum offered in high schools specifically math funding patterns. The ambitious goal of such research is to determine how public financing of high schools affects attendance at colleges and universities. Claire is currently collecting and analyzing data available from the National Center for Education Statistics.

Claire's report is a work in progress so no conclusive data is yet available but the premise of her study is certainly compelling and leads to many questions. Such as: What are the long-term economic implications for the nation when K-12 education revenue is tapped out long before the depths of our children's potential can be plumbed? In order to drive the economy the nation needs its citizens to be Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) savvy, but will this be possible to achieve if K-12 education funding remains static?

Back at the research table work is progressing at a steady pace. The questions posed last fall are well on their way to being answered and now it's a matter of choosing which graphs, charts, and tables will best complement the narrative. A graphic designer has been hired and a report cover has been approved. A palpable sense of excitement can be

sensed as these hardworking volunteers look forward to presenting the report in November.

Bob Poch is very proud of the results of the research collaboration between MMEP and the University of Minnesota. In his opinion the essence of a good partnership is to share resources in an ongoing basis and to play to each other's strength. On balance, the University of Minnesota will have produced the next generation of researchers who have gained experience researching issues of great relevance and concern, and gained public policy experience. In return MMEP will possess quality

research that enhances the credibility of the organization; our communications will not be based on gut instinct but supported by quality research data.

While this fall's conference is an incredibly important venue at which to focus attention on the important issues surrounding the academic achievement of students of color and American Indian students, the ongoing conversations at the Research Collaborative table allow for emerging issues to be discussed on a frequent basis and allow for additional collaborations in the future. ■

State of Students of Color Conference
Early-Bird rates effective until Oct. 15
Members: \$100 Non-members: \$115.00

Report Title Change Explained:***A Letter From Carlos Mariani***

Why "single out" American Indian students in a report on students of color in Minnesota?

Unlike other communities, an "American Indian child" is defined in Minnesota Statute 124D.73 as: "...any child, living on or off a reservation, who is enrolled or eligible for enrollment in a federally recognized tribe."

Federally recognized tribes are those tribes that have a government-to-government relationship with the Federal government based on treaties. For public policy purposes, American Indian students thus are defined by their tribal background rather than by race and ethnicity.

In preparing the report, and planning the conference, the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, Inc.

(MMEP), acknowledges this unique status of American Indian tribes and their members brought about by sovereignty issues.

There are seven Ojibwe tribes/bands in Minnesota and four Dakota communities that are federally recognized. In order to understand the issues and recommendations addressed by this *State of Students of Color and American Indian Students* report, it is important to understand that tribal sovereignty impacts education policy. ■

Staff and Board members wish to acknowledge Jacqueline Fraedrich for persistently advocating for this distinction to be incorporated into the story that MMEP tells. We appreciate her wisdom and patient stewardship. Migwetch.

Fall Training Series Will Address Financial Aid Literacy

College is expensive.

That is the one piece of common knowledge about the higher education system. At the same time it is also well-known that college is a necessary qualification for entry into the middle class. Now more than ever, financial literacy is an integral key to college access.¹

For low-income and first-generation college students and families this is a daunting reality given that they are the populations least likely to have access to quality information about postsecondary financing options.

Aid Awareness Key to College Access

Reports from the Institute for Higher Education Policy indicate that parents play a key role in understanding the financial planning aspect of higher education. In a study of middle school parents it was found that, "Parents whose children are most likely to need financial aid were the least likely to be aware of the various forms of aid. For example, parents with bachelor's degrees were significantly more likely to mention Pell Grants than parents with a high school degree or less."²

According to researcher Dr. Laura Perna this "College Knowledge" is particularly limited among Latino and Black students and parents; she concludes that, "Inadequate knowledge of college prices and financial aid may be one cause of persisting gaps in college enrollment across racial/ethnic and socioeconomic status groups."³ Coupled with the statistic that between 2000 and 2006 the average cost of a four-year college education grew 57% and that federal and state aid has not increased at the same level, getting accurate information about college financing options into the hands of communities of color and low-income youth is more crucial than ever.⁴

Debt: Confronting the Reality

According to the Dēmos policy brief entitled *Higher and Higher Education: Trends in Access, Affordability, and Debt* many college-ready students have been priced out of four-year colleges. In addition, those who do manage to attend college have been forced to incur huge amounts of student debt. "Every year, 410,000 college-qualified students from households with incomes of less than \$50,000 enroll in community college instead of going to a four-year college; another 168,000 college-qualified students don't enroll in college at all."⁵

A 2002 Public Agenda Survey found that 40% of college borrowers had delayed going to college or had gone to a less expensive school to avoid the burden of large student loan debt. Two years later, that organization released the results of another survey that found had money not been an issue a majority of students would have chosen a different school.⁶ A disheartening statistic related to this perceived lack of choice is that "five years after entering community college, only about one in five students who enrolled with the intention of getting an associate's degree accomplished that goal."⁷ This reality disproportion-

ately affects low-income, first generation and students of color. As tuition costs have skyrocketed, college, and in particular obtaining a four-year degree, has become a dream that is less and less attainable for these students. Without accurate information regarding financial aid scholarships, and loans, the net effect will be the limiting of students' options or possibly the complete deterrence of higher education.

For students who do attend college the resulting student loan debt is staggering. In Minnesota, 72% of students graduate with student loan debt averaging \$23,375. Figures are even higher for Pell Grant recipients who average 12% higher loan indebtedness than non-Pell recipients. About 10% of Pell recipients carried more than \$38,000 in student debt when they graduated in 2006.⁸ On average, private student loans not funded by the Perkins, Stafford, PLUS or other federal programs amounted to more than 20% of this debt.⁹

This means that low-income, first generation, and students of color are financing large portions of their education with loans that carry higher interest rates, less favorable terms of repayment, and more potential for long-term credit problems. As a result, one out of five borrowers drop out of school with debt but without completing a degree, and these borrowers are ten times more likely to default on student loans.¹⁰ Student loan debt issues affect nearly three-fourths of Minnesotan students, but knowledge about avoiding debt and making wise borrowing decisions, especially in traditionally underserved populations, is extremely limited.

Training Series Will Address Financial Aid Literacy

Financial literacy is now as crucial to accessing a college education as a college degree is to accessing the American Dream. However, the staff, members, and partners of the Minnesota College Access Network (MCAN) recognize that many students and families lack the requisite knowledge and skills to successfully navigate the complexities of financing a college education; if left unchanged this situation will ultimately lead to lower enrollment rates, less choice, fewer students graduating and more debt for those students who do.

In response, MCAN will work to eliminate this knowledge gap by hosting a training series devoted to financial literacy. Trainings for college access practitioners ranging from basic Financial Aid 101 and Debt Management to targeted information for students, parents, immigrants, African Americans, foster children, and American Indian students will help ensure that Minnesota's students and families have accurate, appropriate, and timely information regarding college financing options. The complete calendar of events can be found at www.mncollegeaccess.org/events.html ■



Amanda Ziebell-Finley (left) and friend pose together. Amanda was recently hired to advise on events and membership for MCAN.

MCAN Hires Membership and Events Consultant

MCAN has grown in the past two years! After a successful Summit and Conference in 2007, and much response to be a part of MCAN's network of "promising practices" practitioners—we have added a consultant to coordinate our membership and events. MCAN is proud to be working with Amanda Ziebell-Finley, a committed

practitioner in the college access field.

Amanda recently served as senior financial aid counselor for the College of St. Catherine. Prior to her time at St. Kate's she worked as a program associate for Admission Possible where she mentored low-income, first generation, and immigrant

students at Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis. Amanda has a bachelor's degree in Political Science from Hamline University and a Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership from the College of St. Catherine.

Amanda expressed her enthusiasm for working with MCAN at this point in her career, "This is an exciting time to be in the college access field. It has been great to help students one-on-one in the past, but working with MCAN gives me the opportunity to change the face of college access by bringing people together to address the issues on a much larger scale. It's about sharing tools and learning from each other. I love that approach and I think a stronger network is what Minnesota and our youth need."

To contact Amanda about upcoming events or for membership information, please e-mail her at aziebell-finley@mmep.net. ■



Visit us online at
www.mncollegeaccess.org

Recent updates include:

- Message Board exclusively for members
- Expanded "News and Resources" section
- Upcoming Trainings & Networking Opportunities

And, as always:

Joining is easy with our online membership form.

Minnesota has lower college access and graduation among students of color, in response MMEP created the Minnesota College Access Network (MCAN) as a strategic initiative to address this issue.

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MCAN Partners

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City of Minneapolis and *I Know I Can* campaign
Minnesota Office of Higher Education *Make It Happen* campaign
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Minnesota TRiO Association
Neighborhood House
Office of the Mayor, City of St. Paul
Praxis Education Project
Robbinsdale Area Schools
Scholarship America
St. Olaf College, TRiO/GEAR UP
University of Minnesota

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Minnesotans collaboratively weave the basket of MMEP with their talents and resources, encircling students of color and encouraging their success.

Minnesota Minority
Education Partnership, Inc.

State of Students
of **COLOR &**
American Indian
Students **CONFERENCE**



Plan to Attend...

**State of Students of Color &
American Indian Students
Conference**

Thursday, November 6, 2008

Coffman Memorial Union
University of Minnesota

Members Only Breakfast &
Report Pre-Release
7:30 a.m.-9:30 a.m.

Conference
9:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Early-Bird Registration
Member: \$100
Non-member: \$115

Register online:
www.mmep.net



Thursday, November 6, 2008