

OVER 20,000 ENROLLMENT

Ivy League Learning

West Contra Costa Unified School District, Richmond, Calif.

PROGRAM NAME

Ivy League Connection

DISTRICT DILEMMA

West Contra Costa Unified School District, in the urban San Francisco Bay area, is made up of mostly minority students (22 percent African American, 46 percent Hispanic, 11 percent white, and 10 percent Asian). It serves students without a family history of post-secondary education; only 15 percent of parents are college graduates. A culture of low expectations among staff, family, and students regarding college attendance was prevalent. The school board and the district wanted to shift those expectations, introducing students to a rigorous college experience.

SOLUTION

The district created a program that sends high school students and chaperones to Ivy League summer studies courses, with each student attending for two consecutive summers. While they're on the East Coast, they visit other highly selective institutions. They return to serve as ambassadors for higher education. School staff members nominate students, who are then interviewed by community members. Students share their experiences with others by blogging (www.IvyLeagueConnection.blogspot.com). They make appearances at school board, city council, and community meetings; as well as high school, middle school, and elementary school classes.

In addition to organizing the trips to Ivy League schools, the program sponsors trips to local college fairs and events. It has coordinated with local alumni groups to provide mentoring and support for students. Students in the program also receive increased college counseling support and tutoring for college testing.

THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

The program was conceived by two school board members—Charles Ramsey and Madeline Kronenberg. Ramsey raised the funds by creating partnerships with community members to underwrite the tuition and



event costs of the program. The board authorized payment for chaperones and student travel from district funds. Ramsey and Kronenberg administer the program, which is now an official subcommittee that reports back at each board meeting.

RESULTS

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of students applying to and attending East Coast schools—and increased awareness and creation of a “college-going culture.” This school year, 20 students applied to Brown University, seven to Cornell University, nine to Columbia University, two to Dartmouth College, and five to the University of Pennsylvania. Many students who would have traditionally limited their applications to the University of California or California State system have expanded their horizons to the Ivy League and other schools. The program has reached out to the local alum communities and have brought them aboard to partner with us and conduct college nights and develop a mentorship relationship. Partnerships with the universities have resulted in more than \$25,000 in matching scholarships for West Contra Costa students at Cornell, Brown, and Dartmouth.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Madeline Kronenberg, West Contra Costa Unified School District School Board member, at mkronen@aol.com. The district's website is at www.wccusd.net.



SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENT

Madeline Kronenberg

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Antonio Medrano
Audrey Miles
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SUPERINTENDENT

Bruce Harter