

Program's goal: more skilled workers

College Summit planning local expansion after pilot project shows early success

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Megen Hammons, left, and Shantel Vinson, both Manual High School seniors, fill out financial aid forms as part of the College Summit.

Business leaders and educators agree on what's needed to improve Indiana's economic health and enhance its place in the global economy: a larger pool of skilled workers.

Toward that end, a group of not-for-profits is expanding a program to get more low-income Indianapolis students to further their education after high school. The Washington, D.C.-based College Summit launched the local effort last summer at Emmerich Manual High School. About 40 Manual students attended a week-long workshop at the University of Indianapolis, where they learned about college life and were encouraged to share that culture with their peers.

During the school year, all of the approximately 200 seniors are enrolled in a College Summit class. Students make a plan for continuing their education after high school and work toward meeting that goal by completing financial aid forms, learning to write personal statements, applying to schools, writing resumes and developing other skills.

Now, with that program showing early success, College Summit has picked Indianapolis for an expansion. It's the

only pilot project among four College Summits launched in the United States this academic year selected for the next phase. That means the program will launch next school year at IPS' T.C. Howe High School and Decatur Township's Decatur Central High School.

Manual officials say they already are seeing a big payoff.

"We know our track record is not very good," said David Brunsting, an academic dean at Manual. "But now we've had multiple kids who never even thought of applying to college but because of this program, they have."

He said 85 percent of Manual's seniors have created a list of colleges where they intend to apply, and about half actually have submitted applications. Historically, few Manual students go on to college. Just 11 percent of Manual seniors took the SAT last year, and just 17 percent took the ACT.

Often, students in urban districts don't seriously consider additional education because their parents aren't college graduates and there isn't an education culture at home, said J.B. Schram, College Summit's CEO.

"Our goal is to have every student find the path that makes sense for them," Schram said. "For some, that'll be four-year schools, others it'll be certificates, the military, associate programs, etc. I hear it everywhere I go. The number one driver of economic growth is the college attainment rate."

Indeed, the top request from businesses considering moving to or expanding in Indiana is a skilled labor force, said Joanne Joyce, CEO of The Indianapolis Private Industry Council Inc., which helps identify work-force needs.

Those needs will become even more pressing as baby boomers retire and leave the work force. One baby boomer in the United States will be hitting 60 years old every seven seconds for the next 18 years, demographic studies show.

"It's more important than ever that every person who has talent has that talent developed so our businesses have the skilled work force they need to survive," Joyce said.

Launched in 1993, College Summit has spread to 150 schools in 10 states. Last year, 73 percent of College Summit seniors applied to

post-secondary school. Nationally, 46 percent of low-income students enroll in college.

College Summit will have several staff members on site at The Mind Trust, an Indianapolis not-for-profit that promotes entrepreneurship in education. The 2-year-old organization provided the \$100,000 needed to launch the Manual pilot. The Mind Trust and the Lumina Foundation, an Indianapolis not-for-profit that funds efforts that expand access to higher education, will kick in another \$455,000 to fund the expansion for five years. At this point, organizers have no plans to expand the program beyond Manual, Howe and Decatur Central.

Local leaders have even loftier goals than getting more low-income students enrolled in post-secondary school. They want them to stay in Indiana and help drive the state's economy.

Schram said students who participate in College Summit are more likely to stay in Indiana than students at suburban high schools, where more than 90 percent of seniors often go on to college.

"The more elite students are the ones most likely to be drawn to the coast," Schram said. "And a lot of college access work is focused on the top kids so there's wisdom in an all-kids strategy because it's equipping more kids."

IPS Superintendent Eugene White said the program is a key part of his district turnaround plan.

"Manual was selected because it has the lowest going-rate to college of all our high schools," said White, who's headed the state's largest school district since 2005. "The fact that 51 percent of seniors have already applied, I think that speaks for itself. We want it to be in all our high schools." •