

## **New program helps CPS students go to college**

April 2, 2008

After reading the March 13 article "Study: More teens could enter college" and the follow-up articles, I wanted to alert you to AIM High, a new mentoring initiative for at-risk urban high school youth we began piloting in Chicago this year. The AIM High program utilizes teams of employees from local businesses to provide CPS students with needed college readiness skills.

The key factors, identified by the study, for why CPS students are not reaching their full potential when it comes to enrolling in higher education include a "lack of structured support and concrete guidance" in: aspiring to and identifying colleges that meet their levels of qualifications; navigating the college application process; and understanding and completing the financial aid process

Our curriculum, delivered in partnership with two Chicago charter schools, directly addresses many of the issues identified by the recent Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) study.

AIM High volunteers, trained by Center for Companies That Care, engage in a mentoring relationship with a single CPS student throughout the four years of high school in which mentors oversee and assist students in: identifying good matches of schools for which students are qualified; visiting college campuses including participation in a summer college bus tour; understanding and preparing for the application process beginning in their sophomore year; and finding financial aid and completing all forms with parents and guardians step-by-step with clear deadlines

Our goal is for every student in the program to reach their full potential and get to and through a four-year college. Currently in its first year, we have 46 students in the program who are supported by 205 mentors from local employers. We are trying to grow this program to ensure at-risk urban high school students have the people in their lives that can help change their trajectories.

While it is crucial to report what the schools "are or are not doing," we hope employers will realize their own stake in whether or not the next generation of our city's youth will be prepared to enter tomorrow's workplace. AIM High asks employers to engage and contribute to remedying the devastating statistics facing Chicago's youth because we know the solution will have to involve everyone; schools, parents, employers, communities and the City of Chicago alike.

Thank you for reporting on such a pressing issue affecting our city's youth. We hope that in the future you will highlight how all key stakeholders in our students' lives can address these matters.

--*Marci Koblenz, President*

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