

# Creating an Elementary to College Education Pipeline Through a University–School–Community Partnership

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## Abstract

Higher education institutions are in a great position to create authentic programming to support local underfunded or underperforming public school districts. This article gives an overview of an education outreach collaborative between a 4-year public university, local schools, and a community institution and highlights lessons learned from the project. This community outreach program emphasizes literacy, social justice, and college preparation. It consists of a fifth grade literacy program, a high school tutoring and mentoring program, and a scholarship program for precollege students, all situated within a local public school system. Literature reviewed shows how collaborative projects can be utilized to support community outreach programs using university resources. Preliminary results from impact measures show positive outcomes among program participants. The program can be replicated in similarly situated university–school–community collaboratives.

*Keywords: literacy, college preparation, mentorship, tutoring, university collaborations, university, community, and school partnerships*



**W**ith a large percentage of public school funding coming from property taxes, inequity in funding exists in United States public school systems. Often, underfunded schools are also schools with a higher population of Black and Latinx students (Boschma & Brownstein, 2016). Universities located near underfunded schools, with access to resources and research opportunities, could potentially serve and benefit the schools, the children, and the local communities. More colleges and universities are recognizing that it is not enough to enter the schools for the purpose of research and not establish authentic lasting collaborations to benefit the schools, children, and their communities. Partnerships and collaborations are key to ongoing support, both for the school district and for the education departments of area education-oriented universities. The mutual benefits show the reciprocity both types of institutions gain

by forming long-term relationships. The university–school–community partnerships can also increase the education experiences for students and provide a foundation for college readiness to students at an early age, which is especially valuable for students attending underfunded or underperforming schools or districts. Universities have the ability to reach out to community agencies to support their efforts in creating authentic partnerships with districts. Although university, school, and community collaborations are needed and can be beneficial, they often come with challenges.

The purpose of this article is to highlight a university-led education outreach program between the university, the community, and the local school district and to discuss the project planning and implementation phase along with the challenges in an effort to support education attainment and college readiness for students in underfunded communities.

## Background

### University–School–Community Collaborations

Partnerships between universities, schools, and local community agencies have recently achieved success in addressing education attainment among urban minority, underrepresented, and low-income youth (Ward et al., 2013). Combining human and financial resources for underperforming schools can maximize the ability to effect change. Universities are increasingly realizing their destinies are linked to community engagement (Harkavy & Hartley, 2009). Successful university, community, and school collaborations share buy-in from all institutions (Ward et al., 2013). Harkavy and Hartley (2009) acknowledged that the challenge in this work is moving beyond limited and short-term community involvement and moving toward establishing lasting and deep collaborative partnerships aimed at addressing real-world problems faced by the communities. Dostilio et al. (2017), in their preliminary competency model for community engagement professionals, identified competencies that community engagement professionals should possess when engaging in community collaborations. Among other competencies outlined, Dostilio et al. recognized that professionals should be able to articulate connections between institutional mission and community engagement, connect campus and community assets, initiate and maintain effective partnerships, and assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

The collective gathering of resources through university, school, and community partnerships in an effort to support students from low-income, low-performing schools can take the pressure off underfunded school districts (Harkavy & Hartley, 2009; Ward et al., 2013). The collaboration outlined here is between a 4-year public higher education institution; a local underperforming, underfunded school district; and a local branch of a nationally recognized financial institution.

### High School to College Pipeline

School to college bridge programs are not new to universities. Universities have been creating bridge programs in an effort to provide education, access, and support to first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented historically marginalized

students. In the past, these efforts have been geared toward helping students *bridge the gap* in their knowledge, with the belief that the students were developmental. Developmental programs have been under scrutiny lately, with many programs changing their names or redesigning their interventions (Cooper et al., 2019).

Educational attainment beyond high school depends on many factors, such as higher median earnings among young adults and sustained employment. Higher education enrollment among low-income and minority youths continues to lag behind that of their nonminority peers (Ward et al., 2013). Universities have created high school to college bridge programs to address college readiness for students upon entering their first year of college. Summer bridge programs typically occur in the summer after high school graduation and offer academic and social skills necessary for college success (Sablan, 2014). According to Ward et al. (2013), the goal of student academic enrichment and support programs is to raise students' awareness of college as a realistic option for their future by

- developing skills for optimal school performance,
- increasing self-efficacy in mastering academic tasks,
- improving educational engagement,
- increasing knowledge and awareness of the college planning process, and
- heightening educational aspirations. (Ward et al., 2013, p. 315)

Over the years, programming created for first-generation high school students or students in underrepresented populations has provided a high school to college pipeline for many students.

This pipeline outreach program attempts to address the blame pipeline. Typically, the education gap blame pipeline can begin at the university level, with colleges blaming education deficiencies on the high schools, high schools blaming middle and elementary schools, and the elementary schools blaming the parents for the education challenges that students experience. Many reasons underlie the achievement gap between Black and Latinx students and their White counterparts: family and home life, school

factors, teacher expectations, and funding inequalities (Weir, 2016). This program attempts to work at each level—elementary/middle level, high school, and college—to provide support and access to address the complicated problem of the academic gap experienced by students of color in often underfunded school districts.

### The Collaborators

The university realized that its very existence places burdens and demands on the local community; therefore, university administrators have made diversity, engagement, enrichment, and sustainability key themes in its strategic plan (West Chester University, 2020c). But simply saying there is a mission is not enough. It takes effort and dedication to commit to activities to enrich the surrounding community, and a collaboration helps to relieve workload pressure on any contributing individual.

#### *The University and the Frederick Douglass Institute*

The 4-year higher education institution involved in the collaboration is a public university. For over 20 years, the Frederick Douglass Institute (FDI) at the institution has worked to address the challenges of social justice and equity on campus and throughout the community (West Chester University, 2020b). The FDI within the university, guided by the work of Frederick Douglass, seeks to uplift the education attainment of children in the area of literacy and college achievement. The institute works to educate on multicultural education and social justice both inside and outside the university. Through an educational outreach program the institute engages elementary, middle, and high school students and offers educational programming with a focus on literacy and social justice.

An influential writer and speaker, Frederick Douglass had a powerful discourse that radiates through time. Douglass is known for entwining figures of speech and literary prowess to express his belief that our country would thrive when diverse voices were heard (Leeman, 2018, p. 289). In an inscription of *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass wrote, “The way to conquer contempt for the lowly is to work for their elevation” (Powell, 2017, para. 3). Douglass had a mission of education and found ways to educate himself in order to free himself from slavery, not just physical-

ly, but also emotionally and intellectually. In order to advance Douglass’s mission, the FDI continues to promote equity and quality education for all. The members of FDI take it upon themselves to continue to educate the community and provide access to educational opportunities to all community members. From one-book projects to exhibits, speeches, and oratorical debates, the institute supports both current undergraduate students and the larger neighboring community by envisioning ways to model Douglass’s desire to share knowledge with others.

#### *The School District*

A local steel mill in one of our neighboring communities is America’s oldest and longest continuing steel mill and drew many people to the area for jobs in the early 1800s. In 1968, the mill created 152 steel “tree” beams used in the World Trade Center. Automation over the years increased the amount of steel forged annually from 500,000 tons in 1919 to 900,000 tons annually today (McCullough, 2010). However, jobs decreased due to automation, and the mill currently employs only 638 of the population (DiStefano, 2020). The shift created a loss of income for many people in the area; 30.1% of residents now live below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018a), so sending high school students to college is difficult. The local school district lists its mission as providing “equitable opportunities for all students so that they will take ownership of their education and grow within a community of learners” (Coatesville Area Senior High School, n.d., para. 1). However, the Coatesville Area School District has the lowest graduation rates and is in the highest area of need in the county. In Coatesville, 15.2% of residents have graduated college, compared to 34.7% and 56.5% in two nearby towns of similar stature (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018a). Nationally, an average 30.9% of residents have a bachelor’s degree or above, which leaves Coatesville City at about half the national average (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b). Within the district, there are a fast-paced city, several suburbs, and an expansive rural area, which make equity in socioeconomic status difficult to achieve. In order to provide equitable opportunities for all, partnerships with others in the community are a necessity.

### Financial Institution

The bank partner has a long history of supporting the community with local grants that fund projects aimed at education and solving complex societal problems (Wells Fargo, 2020). Through the bank's foundation, communities are supported, and partnerships are forged to tackle community and societal ills. The university applied for an initial bank grant; with the bank, it had a joint goal of building a bridge of academic success spanning elementary through college graduation into professional success in an effort to support a community in need. The grant was divided into three programs: the Elementary Reading Program, Tutoring and College Readiness and the Scholars Program. Additional funding to support this program beyond its initial 3 years has since been secured. This grant has given the university and the institute an opportunity to collaborate and plan with the school district a program aiming to offer equity opportunities for the students in the local school district through an elementary school to college pipeline. Here we give an overview of the three programs funded.

### Program and Grant Overview

When universities consider preparing students of color and strengthening the high school pipeline specifically for students at underfunded public schools, creating collaborations between universities and PK-12 schools is recommended (Alford, 2014). The university-school-community partnership depended on a reciprocal relationship between the university, schools, and a local community agency. University constituents first met with a local financial institution and proposed a potential win-win collaboration, where the financial institution would get a tax benefit and support the local com-

munity, thereby adding to their credibility in the community, and the institution would receive grant funding to support their endeavors for community outreach and supportive funding.

The university then researched underperforming schools in the area and began partnering with the most underfunded of the districts. University faculty, in collaboration with district leaders, met to discuss the best way to meet the needs of the district. The focus of the program would include increasing literacy skills, supporting college preparatory activities, and providing access to students who would not normally be able to afford college. A letter of understanding was developed with the school district that enabled faculty and tutors to enter the schools. Faculty then could submit their needs to the grant funders in the form of a grant request (see Table 1). The request involved all components of the program and provided for program reporting back to the institution in order to secure future funding from year to year.

The program consisted of three components, the elementary school reading program, the high school tutorial program, and the precollege scholars' program, all of which were supported by a community grant. The programs were created with best practices and shared goals of successful community engagement and high school to college pipeline goals in mind. This article takes a look at the collaborators, the project, and its challenges (see Table 2) while identifying community professional competencies used for program success.

This education and community outreach effort utilized three of Dostilio et al.'s (2017) community engagement competencies across the programs: facilitating students'

**Table 1. General Budget Requests**

Component	Description	Quantity	Requested funds
Component 1: Elementary Reading Program	Books or ebooks	500	\$4,000
Component 2: Tutoring and College Readiness	Tutors	4-5 @ \$10 an hour for 5 hours a week for 30 weeks	\$6,000- \$7,500
Component 3: The Scholars Program	Scholarships, laptops, and software	3 students each year	\$12,000
Total grant request			\$22,000- \$23,500

**Table 2. Overview of Program Goals Evaluation and Challenges**

	<b>Component 1: Elementary Reading Program</b>	<b>Component 2: Tutoring and College Readiness</b>	<b>Component 3: The Scholars Program</b>
<b>Program goals</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To introduce students to concepts of equity, fairness, and social justice</li> <li>2. To provide students with quality literature</li> <li>3. To engage 5th graders in literacy skills</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To tutor high school students for college readiness</li> <li>2. To engage undergraduates with service-learning</li> <li>3. To provide mentorship to high school students</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide scholarships to two students to attend the university</li> </ol>
<b>Program evaluation</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 5th grade pre- &amp; posttests</li> <li>2. Teacher survey</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Self-assessment survey</li> <li>2. Student participation</li> <li>3. Tutor survey</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Program recipients finish the 5-week Summer Bridge Program</li> </ol>
<b>Program considerations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Scheduling and time for both the teachers and the faculty</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Transportation</li> <li>2. The future of funding</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consider opening the scholarship (pending funding) to other programs on campus</li> </ol>

civic learning and development, administering community engagement programs, and cultivating high quality partnerships. Table 3 illustrates how components of the competencies (i.e., skills and commitments) are demonstrated across the three outreach programs.

### **Component 1: The Elementary Reading Program**

For many years, the university's Frederick Douglass Institute has had an education outreach component that seeks to increase literacy, multicultural education, and social justice awareness for elementary school children, especially children of color or in high poverty areas. The Elementary Reading Program, instituted as the Fifth Grade One Grade One Book Literacy Project, was designed to give children access to books and activities dealing with African American history and touching on issues of equity and social justice. The program was intended to support and supplement the literacy efforts of the schools. After receiving a grant, the program was able to expand. Instead of

working with one or two classes a year, the program expanded to all fifth graders in that local school district. Because Pennsylvania's standardized tests (PSSA) are administered in the fifth grade year, the school district curriculum coordinator decided to implement the program across all fifth grade classrooms in the district. Prior to this, the program had been offered in surrounding districts for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students.

The reading program had three main goals: (1) increase the literacy skills of area fifth graders, (2) engage the students in critical thinking surrounding issues of social justice, and (3) provide reading resources to classroom teachers and fifth grade students. Teaching with multicultural children's literature is a way to begin conversations on inequalities, race, culture, and discrimination under the guidance of the teacher, and using authentic multicultural children's literature allows children to see each other in nonstereotypical ways (Morgan, 2009). Using the state standards, the activities focused on reading with accuracy and fluency, comprehending and recalling a text,

**Table 3. Community Engagement Competencies**

Competencies	Skills	Commitments	The Frederick Douglass Elementary, High School, and College Pipeline Program
Facilitating students' civic learning and development	<p>Able to facilitate peer-to-peer discussion that positively impacts student learning</p> <p>Able to construct solid learning outcome goals</p> <p>Able to collaborate with and support historically marginalized students</p>	<p>Committed to cultivating authentic relationships with students</p> <p>Committed to developing students' critical consciousness</p>	<p>Developing relationships with students in all sections of the pipeline</p> <p>Introducing elementary school students to critical concepts of social justice</p>
Administering community engagement programs	<p>Able to collaborate and work across role and disciplinary silos</p> <p>Able to cultivate and maintain relationships</p> <p>Able to cultivate and manage multiple funding streams and budgets</p> <p>Able to develop and supervise staff</p> <p>Able to collect and analyze data</p>	<p>Committed to dialogue with communities</p> <p>Able to unveil and disrupt unequal power structures</p>	<p>Open dialogue between district, university, and community financial organization about the needs of the students and the programs</p> <p>Providing access and attempting to close gaps in education and finances</p>
Cultivating high quality partnerships	<p>Able to connect campus and community assets</p> <p>Able to initiate and maintain effective partnerships</p> <p>Able to involve partnership members in reflection on and assessment of partnerships</p>	<p>Conscious of power relations inherent in partnerships</p> <p>Committed to cultivating authentic relationships with communities</p>	<p>Allowing students, teachers, district leaders, and university faculty/staff/students to offer feedback and reflect regularly on the program</p>

Note. Adapted from Dostilio, L. D., Benenson, J., Chamberlin, S., Crossland, S., Farmer-Hanson, A., Hernandez, K., & colleagues. (2017). Preliminary competency model for community engagement professionals. In L. D. Dostilio (Ed.), *The community engagement professional in higher education: A competency model for an emerging field* (pp. 46–61). Campus Compact.

reading informational nonfiction texts, and increasing writing in response to literature.

### The Key Players

When starting up any program, identifying the key players to run the program is critical. Frequently, with time constraints and lack of funding, finding individuals to share in the responsibility can be challeng-

ing. Initially, a faculty member was charged with organizing, planning, and implementing the Elementary Reading Program. At the onset of the project, Year 1, one designated faculty member was in charge of the pre-planning, meetings, communication with teachers and district administrators, and planning curricula and assessments. During Year 2, two faculty members carried out the project. The faculty member who designed

and currently runs the program has over 30 years of experience in education, 18 of which were spent teaching for a large school district in the region. Both faculty members have a wealth of experience in education and in public school teaching. Graduate assistants handled the behind the scenes aspects of the project. The district classroom teachers had the bulk of responsibility for carrying out the reading and literacy activities in the classroom.

### Getting Started

The planning for the program began in summer 2016 before the anticipated fall 2016 start. This planning included selecting the first book, incorporating the fifth grade English–Language Arts standards, writing an activity guide to pair with the book, and creating a pretest and posttest. In the past, the project had been carried out on a smaller scale in a different district. This was an opportunity to refine and enhance the already existing methodology. For Year 1 and Year 2, the selection of the book was easy. *Who Was Frederick Douglass?* by April Jones Prince (Prince, 2018) was selected as a nonfiction work that would allow the students to learn more about the life and legacy of Frederick Douglass. Although the book's reading level was not challenging, we hoped that its historical nature and the high content focus would challenge even the children who thought the reading was easy.

The literacy activity guide included activities the teachers could use paired with reading of the book. The activities were supported by the state standards for the fifth grade. The guide included comprehension questions tied to each chapter, end of the book suggestions for activities, and activities that encourage writing and critical thinking. The teachers were given the option of using the guide in addition to creating their own activities. For Year 3, the teachers opted to select a different title. *Who Were the Tuskegee Airmen?* by Sherri Smith (Smith, 2018) was selected. The grant allowed all fifth grade students (approximately 450) in the local school district to participate. Each student received a copy of the book to keep upon program completion.

### The Project

The initial phase of the project included communication with the teachers in an effort to ensure smooth program implementation. The program began in the

2016–2017 academic year, just after we had completed Year 3 of the One Grade One Book Literacy Project, sponsored by the university. Initially, after meeting with the district curriculum coordinator, we decided to begin the project during PSSA testing. The fifth graders would test in the morning and then read the book and complete activities during the afternoon. The project ran for 2 full weeks. Upon completing the pretest, students read the book with guidance from their teachers. The children completed literacy activities, discussions, and ongoing writing activities centered on the book.

Pennsylvania fifth grade English and Language Arts state standards were considered when creating activities. Once the book was completed, each class was allowed to select how they would show what they learned. Some classes elected to do individual projects, and in other classes the students worked in small groups, with each group creating their own project. As an impact measure, teachers were sent a survey to share their thoughts on improving the program or making changes.

### Assessment

In order to determine program impact, quantitative and qualitative measures are performed at three separate levels: the students, the classroom teachers, and the faculty. The students receive a pretest and a posttest to assess comprehension, reading standards, and writing reflecting on issues of social justice. The tests include both multiple choice questions and open-ended questions. At the end of the project, the classroom teachers are given a short survey to gather information to guide the program. This survey includes multiple choice questions and an open-ended question, allowing the teachers to reflect on the program, both the content and organization. Finally, the program faculty are able to offer reflection on what worked well and what challenges exist. Early preliminary impact measures show positive feedback and program success through the students, classroom teachers, and faculty overall satisfaction. A few challenges were identified, but all teachers and faculty thought the program was worthy and wished to continue.

### Existing Challenges

When starting a new initiative, it is beneficial to examine the program for challenges and opportunities for improvement. As in

most university–community collaborations, challenges may arise. The university faculty members were able to identify challenges from the perspectives of both the university faculty and the teachers in the schools. From the perspective of the university, having enough human resources to run the program was an initial challenge. Faculty members are often pulled in many directions, and finding enough time to spend in the schools can pose a challenge. Project sustainability can also be a challenge. To ensure our program continued in the event the primary faculty were no longer at the institution nor running the program, we talked with department chairs and selected dedicated faculty to administer the program, with the understanding that the FDI is the supervising body for the project. This way, reporting for all three components can be collected in one area and provided to the financial institution. Additionally, if faculty turnover occurs, the FDI has the function and capacity to search for substitutions.

Schoolteachers tend to have busy schedules, and sometimes adding one more project to their plate can feel overwhelming. Being able to agree on the best time to run the project was also a challenge, since holidays, test preparation, and statewide testing make finding a stretch of time that makes sense for the students and teachers challenging. To overcome these challenges, school administration and faculty met at the beginning of the year to communicate how the graduate students and faculty would be assisting in the creation of activities and lesson plans. Additionally, we looked at the university and school calendars to find the appropriate stretch of time. Of course, changes in the academic year schedules will require that this time budgeting be repeated each year.

### *Moving Forward*

In an effort to strengthen the program, ongoing use of survey data will enable the teachers to indicate the best time and method of communication. All participating teachers will be encouraged to respond to the survey. An attempt will be made to include planning and meeting times occurring at least once before the start of the program. Ensuring that each fifth–grade teacher has an opportunity to meet and plan and get on the same page will be helpful. In the future we also hope to include funding to compensate teachers for meeting times.

## **Component 2: Tutoring and College Readiness at the High School**

Tutoring is a method of helping learners find their own paths. A successful peer-assisted learning atmosphere incorporates strategies and interventions requiring a tutor to have a perfected skill set (Topping, 2001). For this tutoring program, tutors are trained to understand the academic needs of high school students who may be only a few years younger (College Reading and Learning Association, 2018). Highly prescriptive tutoring programs with specific tasks for tutors are more effective than less organized ones (Roller, 1998, p.1); therefore, we ask students what they would like to accomplish, and tutors have a plan designed for moving through the learning process. Programs where students have to find their own answers are “more effective than those in which the tutor provides answers” (Roller, 1998, p. 1). Our tutors do not simply answer students’ questions; rather, they use a questioning method to help students learn new ways to find the information on their own. Utilizing the Socratic method helps experienced tutors ask probing questions in order to lead their students to a process of critical thinking (Boghossian, 2006). If a tutor understands how learners might not have the preparation needed to accomplish the student learning outcomes of their current coursework, the tutor can help the learner by searching for more root problems.

This method, incorporating Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (ZPD), was originally designed for youth peer-to-peer learning experiences, but the idea that a more skilled person can help lesser skilled peers is also applicable in adult learning (Harland, 2003). Colvin’s (2007) study defined the skills needed for peer tutoring, as well as the ethical implications of tutoring, while coding and quantifying the tutoring experience. The study gave a definition of peer tutoring and described its challenge (Colvin, 2007, p. 173). For this project, the tutors are trained to understand their roles as peer tutors, select an academic focus within the session, and draw learning from the student while building study skills applicable across subjects. The tutors also have to be dynamic in order to engage their high school counterparts in learning needed material.



## The Key Players

The tutoring program is run by a professional with 20 years of experience managing a learning assistance center and 17 years of teaching in higher education. Four or five tutors have been chosen each year, and the positions are coveted due to the limited number of hours and competitive pay rate. The tutors are undergraduate students at the university and must have completed at least one semester in order to provide a GPA. The tutors were selected based on their cumulative GPA of at least a 3.0, their ability to travel to the school, and their proven dedication to working with high school students. An upper-class student was chosen to help support the other tutors while on site, as well as to help promote the program to additional teachers and students while at school.

## Getting Started

Planning for the high school portion of the program included designing a tutoring program to meet the needs of high school students who may or may not be making the decision to go to college. During the first year, tutors got to know the students at the high school and determined which students could best benefit from the program. No students were turned away, but many of the students had never considered going to college, and therefore the project goals and objectives had to be rewritten as needed.

The revised program included between five and 10 tutors, a driver to transport the tutors to the school, and increased collaboration between the tutors and the school contacts. Enticing the students included creating a *frequent flyer* card, so students received punches for the number of times they came to tutor. After a designated number of on-time, prepared attendance punches, students were offered the choice of several rewards, from snacks to T-shirts.

## The Project

Tutors are trained at the beginning of each semester in valuable student learning methods and theories (College Reading and Learning Association, 2018). They ride together on Tuesdays and Thursdays out to the school district, which is about a half hour ride from the university. When they arrive, they are greeted by the assistant principal, who has been a valuable asset to the team. Tutoring is announced during the

morning and afternoon announcements by the assistant principal, and the program is well supported by the teaching faculty and coaches at the high school.

Tutor training occurs at the beginning of each semester, and tutors are asked to assess student levels at the beginning of each day. The tutors are available every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon at the end of the school day throughout the school year. They ask their students to complete a survey at the end of each session for programmatic assessment, which helps to redesign future tutor training.

## Assessment

When tutoring begins, students fill out a preassessment asking what they would like to work on and how they are feeling about their coursework. They meet with tutors who can help them in their needed subjects. The tutors are interdisciplinary but also have some main focus areas, such as math, writing, and SAT prep. At the end of each session, students receive a postassessment and their attendance cards are stamped. The assessments are used for programmatic design and tutor retraining, not for studying student progress. If students attend more than five sessions, they are offered a choice of prizes, such as a West Chester University lanyard or T-shirt, all provided by the university.

We found that incentives, such as prizes and snacks, make students more motivated to attend; however, in satisfaction surveys, students have said they appreciate the services, and some had never thought they would attend college but are now not only considering applying, but actively filling out applications. The students enjoy the program, but they feel more of their friends would attend if they had transportation home. No second bus is available after school, so if they do not have transportation from friends, they cannot attend the program. Students also appreciate the food and snacks, so one addition for the 2019–2020 year is offering snacks at each session. Because many of the students come from food-insecure families, they appreciate the healthy snacks provided by the tutors.

## Existing Challenges

Initially, the main challenge for the tutoring program was transportation. Many students need and desire tutoring, and the under-

graduate student tutors wanted to help, especially when they discovered they could be paid for the opportunity. Transporting the tutors to the school and not having after-school transportation for the students hindered the attendance at first. After brainstorming ways to transport the tutors, the challenge was solved by hiring a graduate student and using a university van. This graduate student also serves as a supervisor to keep the tutors on track, as well as a role model tutor. Incorporating incentives for students provided them more reason to stay after school for the program.

### *Moving Forward*

Assessing the program's effectiveness has been the key to moving forward. As with any program, more funding means more opportunities, so presenting our results to key stakeholders is imperative. During Year 3 of the program, as the numbers of tutors and students increased, we implemented a pre- and postassessment for each tutoring day. The future of the tutoring program is centered on funding, as the need is there, and the students are willing to participate. Since the transportation issue has a long-term solution, the learning component can take place at a sustainable level, as there is no lack of students who need the help and no lack of college-aged, trained tutors who want to support their local community.

### **Component 3: The Scholars Program**

The third program supported by the bank grant is the Scholars Program. Two students are selected from the Coatesville High School tutoring program to attend the Academic Development Program (ADP; now known as the ASP—Academic Success Program, West Chester University, 2020a). ADP is a summer bridge program aimed at students with potential who were not accepted into West Chester University's regular admit programs. The program offers support structures for students ranging from tutoring and mentoring to college prep basic skills classes. The scholarship supports students through their summer program, including tuition and room and board.

### **Key Players**

The Scholars Program is a link to the university's bridge program. The funder decided it would be an appropriate aspect of the grant and overall collaboration to finan-

cially support students who went through the tutoring program and wanted to attend the university.

### **The Program**

As with other bridge programs, the university's bridge program provides access to the institution for students who may not have the SAT scores needed for regular admission. However, students attend a summer bridge, where they live in a learning community and take classes with their peers, in order to provide them academic skills in reading, writing, and math (West Chester University, 2020a). They are supported through individualized academic advising, tutoring, mentoring, and counseling. The Scholars Program allows students from the supported local school district the funding to attend the summer bridge program.

### *Moving Forward*

No current challenges have presented themselves in this part of the program. Looking to the future, as students come through the program from fifth grade through graduation, we hope to have funding to funnel more students through the pipeline and have access to college through the summer bridge program.

### **Discussion: Creating University-School-Community Partnerships**

Creating a collaboration between the university, the community, and a local high-need school district allowed programming to support students' college preparation and access. The partnership of the university, the schools, and the community funding agency helped to strengthen the mutual missions of the institute—equity in education and support through school to college. In creating this partnership, the leaders considered the skills and abilities of the competency model for community engagement professionals (Dostilio et al., 2017) to ensure the creation of a successful and sustainable project. Looking back on the three-part project, there are implications for other institutions looking to establish similar programs.

### **Timeline for Success**

Developing a successful timeline includes taking into consideration the needs of the students and instructors involved. The fol-

lowing are steps to take when replicating the program (see Figure 1).

First, become familiar with the competencies necessary for community engagement professionals and incorporate best practices into your planning. University, school, and community partnerships require knowledge, skills, and abilities to ensure the partnership is reciprocal and authentic. Next, when planning collaborations, it is critical to find common missions and goals for the university, schools, and community. Begin program planning based on the common thread in the missions of each institution and identify the program challenges. As the program is running, and after each leg of the program, stop and take a close look at the challenges. At the start of a program, be aware of the importance of assessing with key learning outcomes. Undergraduate students at universities are eager to participate actively in university–led community–school partnerships—they just need the resources and support. Finally, time needs to be set aside for planning and support for all involved. Planning and scheduling time can too easily be overlooked or altogether omitted in the funding. Making time for planning and scheduling helps to support the project’s sustainability.

University–school–community partnerships can be beneficial to all agencies and the stu-

dents they serve. Establishing funding from an outside source allowed the FDI to expand upon education outreach work.

## Conclusion

Institutions can benefit and have a larger impact on the local community by working as partners to effect change in the education arena. Universities and community agencies hold a wealth of resources and can serve as assets to local underfunded or undersupported school districts and students. Creating university–school collaborations can be a way to begin to bridge the equity gap within those districts. These collaborations, although beneficial, can pose challenges that hamper or impede success. Community engagement professionals should utilize the competencies necessary for successful collaborations (Dostilio et al., 2017) in an effort to plan, implement, and assess the accomplishments of these alliances. Programs created should be built on shared missions between the university, the schools, and the community while evaluating programs to better address presented challenges. Partnerships and collaborations are key to ongoing support, both for the school districts and the community. The mutual benefits show the reciprocity institutions gain by forming long-term relationships.

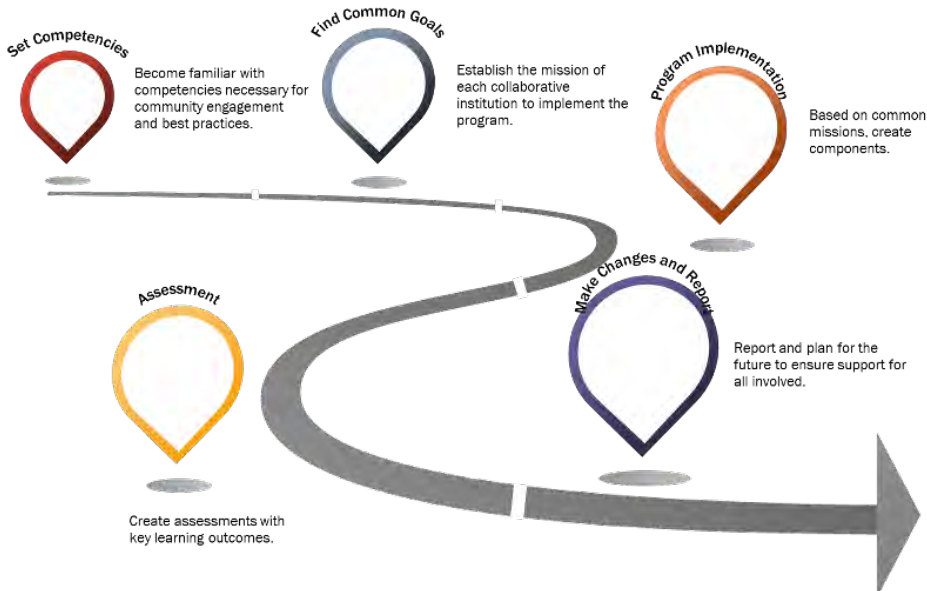


Figure 1. Timeline



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