

Transforming systems in pursuit of equitable outcomes

Actionable learning from the Cradle to Career Network

Higher Expectations for Racine County | Racine County, Wis.



OUTCOMES:

- Postsecondary enrollment
- Postsecondary completion

SYSTEMS INDICATORS:

- School climate/discipline
- Financial barriers to postsecondary enrollment
- Internship and mentorship opportunities/partnerships

KEY LEARNING:

Starting with a common goal — and continually measuring progress against that goal to keep priorities front and center — nearly doubled postsecondary graduation rates.

What did the network member do?

In Wisconsin, Higher Expectations for Racine County is increasing postsecondary graduation rates by creating a college-going culture. Six-year graduation rates at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside have increased from 24.3% to 41.5% since Higher Expectations launched the Postsecondary Education and Training Network in 2015. Higher Expectations received a community grant from the Lumina Foundation to support attainment efforts as well as financial and technical assistance from StriveTogether matches student credit loads with the credits needed for on-time graduation. By redesigning the math curriculum, eliminating math remediation and creating accessible academic and postsecondary financial advising, the partnership

has been able to create a positive experience in school with inclusive messaging around the accessibility of postsecondary education — i.e., the idea that anyone can, and should, continue their education after high school.

These strategies are now being expanded to the broader Milwaukee 7 region, which includes seven counties of southeastern Wisconsin. As a region, 17 postsecondary institutions convene on a monthly basis in an effort to improve postsecondary completion across the region based on the successes seen in Racine.

What are the challenges?

Building trust and aligning partners to address inequities is often a slow process. In line with their key learning, Higher Expectations experienced challenges with keeping different institutions focused on the “big goal” when each had competing priorities and challenges, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Different types of postsecondary institutions — including 2-year, 4-year, public and private partners — don’t always see their institutional similarities or the benefits of learning from one another. Because of this, the process of setting agreed-upon accountability structures took longer than anticipated.

Additionally, Higher Expectations had to work toward building trust and comfort with sharing disaggregated, institutional data more broadly.

What are the key takeaways?

In grappling with these challenges, Higher Expectations has learned the importance of having an agreed-upon goal everyone is striving toward, and continually measuring progress against that goal to keep the work front and center. This target setting exercise was key to the project because it provided a mechanism for both accountability and real-time improvement. Additionally, Racial Equity Institute training for key members of each institutional team helped partners understand structural racism and why collective impact is needed to close equity gaps.

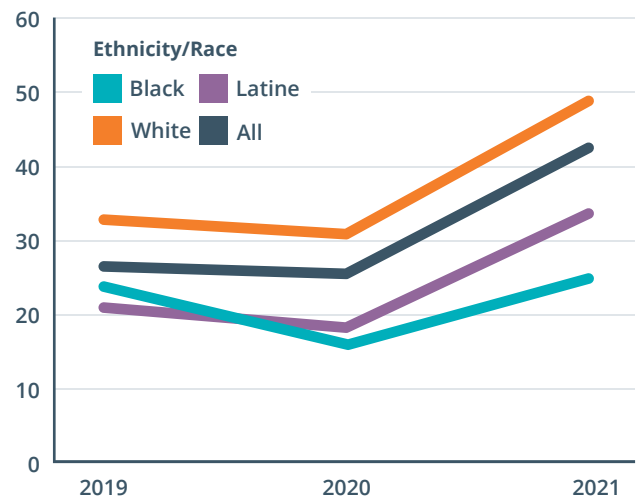
A large part of their success stems from starting the work with a narrative shift — from “what do you want to be when you grow up?” to “what do you want your life to look like?” This helped

students realize that high school graduation is not the end of their academic trajectory, but rather the first step in building the life they want. By offering accessible guidance and mentorship, they increased feelings of hope, shifted the perceptions around the affordability of postsecondary education and created a college-going culture.

They also learned the importance of building trust around sharing institutional data to more accurately gauge student success, as well as the importance of offering dual credits and workplace learning to keep students motivated in their trajectory toward the workforce. For this work, Higher Expectations set three-year institutional targets for retention and graduation plus annual targets for key indicators such as credit accrual, gateway math completion and remedial math participation. These data points are not available through the National Student Clearinghouse, which created a need to work with individual institutions on data sharing.

POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION

(3- OR 6-YEAR RATE AT CARTHAGE, PARKSIDE AND GATEWAY)



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