

**BUILDING
EDUCATIONAL
SUCCESS
THROUGH**

COLLABORATION IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY

**Creating a College Going Culture Conference
June 1, 2006**

**Melissa Friedman MacDonald
and Aimée Dorr, UCLA**



CENTINELA VALLEY UNION
HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Creating a College Going Culture Conference June 1, 2006

Melissa Friedman MacDonald and Aimée Dorr, UCLA

On June 1, 2006, 52 people attended the second conference of the *BEST Collaboration in Los Angeles County* initiative. The conference brought together local school districts and institutions of higher education who are currently working together collaboratively to enhance the educational experiences of public school students in Los Angeles County. The conference was designed to meet the following goals:

1. To increase knowledge of how to build a college going culture in high schools located in Los Angeles County.
2. To provide partnerships with the opportunity to collaborate toward developing an action plan for cultivating a college going culture at their respective schools.

This report includes information about the initiative, the conference, and participants' reactions to the conference. In addition, learning outcomes and next steps are also addressed. A separate report describes the building blocks of a college going culture as identified by attendees.

The Initiative

Throughout Los Angeles County, many school districts collaborate with other institutions in their efforts to advance educational opportunity, academic success, and college going for their students, especially for their most disadvantaged students. *Building Educational Success Through (BEST) Collaboration in LA County* intends to create a web of such collaborations so that they can learn from each other, avoid duplication and enhance synergy, band together when useful, and support new collaborations in their efforts to improve K-12 public schools in Los Angeles County.

The initiative developed as the result of an agreement between the California County Superintendents Educational Services Associations (CCSESA) and the University of California (UC) to build a P-20 regional alliance. CCSESA Region 11 is the only region composed of just one county, Los Angeles County, represented by the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE). In the county, UC is represented by the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). *BEST Collaboration in LA County* was started by LACOE Superintendent Darline Robles and UCLA Co-Chair of Academic Preparation and Educational Partnerships Programs Aimée Dorr and their colleagues. The initiative held its first meeting on November 10, 2005 with 77 attendees representing six successful partnerships from across LA County. As a result of attending this first conference, one local school district volunteered to take a leadership role in planning this second event. As such, the June 1st conference was developed primarily by Centinela Valley Union High School District Superintendent Cheryl White, with assistance from UCLA, LACOE, and LAUSD Local District 7

Superintendent Carol Truscott. This steering committee will continue to expand as more partnerships join the regional network and prepare for future conferences.

The Conference

The June 1 conference featured several activities designed to identify elements of a college going culture and to aid participants in designing action plans for cultivating such an environment at their own schools. Teams representing three school districts and two institutions of higher education began the day by listening to Superintendent Cheryl White provide data about the status of AP courses, college preparation, and rates of continuation into college for high schools in Los Angeles County. Participants benefited from a keynote address by Dr. Patricia McDonough who is an expert in college access and a Professor of Education at UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. Professor McDonough also played an instrumental role in developing the conference content by providing critical planning tools, literature, and other relevant information about cultivating college going cultures in high schools. Her speech entitled "Improving College Access: Building a College Culture" included a brief overview of the college access gap and described nine critical principles involved in creating a college culture for all students. The presentation set the stage for small group discussions in which district teams worked toward creating an action plan for developing college awareness at their respective schools. In anticipation of this small group work, district teams were asked to bring school data pertaining to the college preparation curriculum and college matriculation at their respective high schools. A closing discussion brought the large group together in order to review the action plans in progress and to discuss the next steps for the initiative.

Conference Participants

Four successful collaborations from around Los Angeles County participated in this conference. The goal was for each partnership to have as a minimum a team representing a district superintendent, a high school principal, a teacher from that school, and a representative from a participating institution of higher education. Invitations were extended to all individuals who participated in the November 10th conference and district superintendents and districts were asked to compose their own teams. Superintendent Robles reimbursed schools for two substitute days for each participating classroom teacher. The following list represents the participating school districts and their partner universities.

- Centinela Valley Union High School District & University of California, Los Angeles
- Hacienda La Puente Unified School District & California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
- Los Angeles Unified School District, Local District 7 & University of California, Los Angeles
- Los Angeles Unified School District, Local District 7 & University of Southern California

Of the 52 participants, 43 (83%) completed a written assessment that provided information about what they learned from the conference, their perceptions of conference activities, and next steps. Twenty-three respondents were directly associated with public schools (2 superintendents, 3 principals, 12 teachers, 6 counselors, 1 consultant), and six were associated with institutions of higher education. Two people were LACOE administrators, five were in specialized areas of district administration, and six did not identify their position.

Learning from the Conference: Building a College Going Culture

A primary goal of the conference was for participants to learn how to build college going cultures at their schools. All participants reported learning at least one building block of a college going culture, and 81% reported learning two (the maximum requested in the assessment).

The learning outcomes regarding how to create a college going culture fell into nine thematic categories. Four were reported by only a small number of participants (6% for Engaging Feeder Schools, 5% for Professional Development for College Counseling, 5% for District-Site Collaborations, and 3% for Customizing AVID Programs). The remaining five were each mentioned by more than 10% of respondents, as shown in Figure 1.

The most common types of learning outcomes included promoting college talk in all classrooms and integrating into the curriculum college awareness activities such as admission essay contests and college clubs. The “Other” category contained a wide range of responses and any potential subcategories contained two items at most. Examples of “other” responses include scheduling AP courses after school, increasing the rigor of all academic coursework, and the nine critical principles described in Professor McDonough’s presentation.

Learning Outcomes by Thematic Category

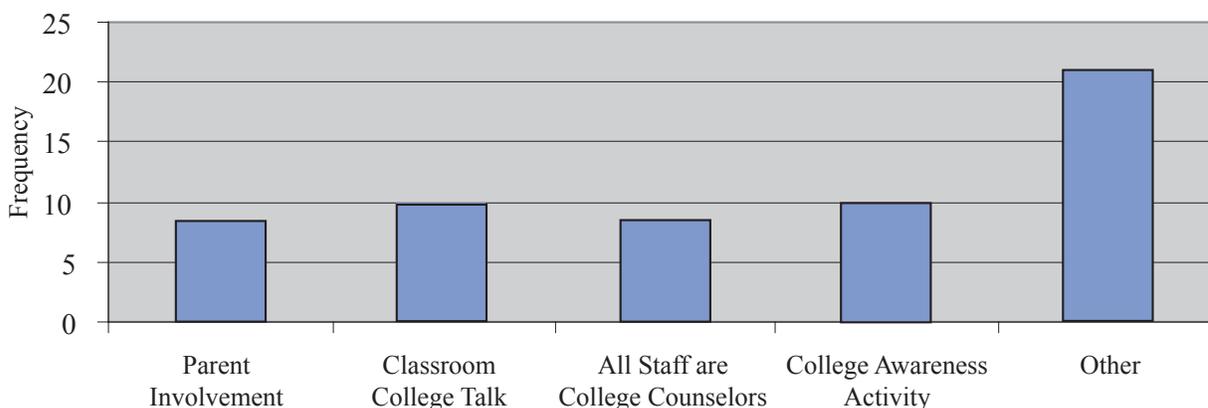


Figure 1. Number of conference participants reporting they learned an element of college going culture in any of five thematic categories (42 respondents total).

Learning from the Conference: Challenges

Although it was not a specified goal for this conference, participants discussed important challenges that they face in their attempts to cultivate a college going culture. The vast majority (98%) of respondents described at least one challenge, and most reported that they would like challenges to be a focus of future conferences.

The challenges fell into eight thematic categories. Two (Parent Involvement and Engaging Feeder Schools) were the same as those for the learning outcomes. Three of the eight categories were mentioned by only a small group of respondents (4% for Changing School Culture, 4% for Scheduling Conflicts, 3% for Engaging Feeder Schools). The remaining five were reported by more than 10% of respondents, as shown in Figure 2. The most commonly mentioned challenge involved lack of faculty buy in and staff engagement. Roughly equal numbers of challenges fell into the parent involvement, low teacher expectations, and lack of resources categories. Similar to the learning outcome data, a large number of responses were coded as “Other.” This was due to the wide range of responses which were so diverse that it was not possible to create conceptual clusters of more than two items. Examples of “other” responses include consistency, staff turnover, lack of administrative support, the track system, building partnerships with institutions of higher education (IHEs), and an emphasis on testing rather than promoting college.

Challenges by Thematic Category

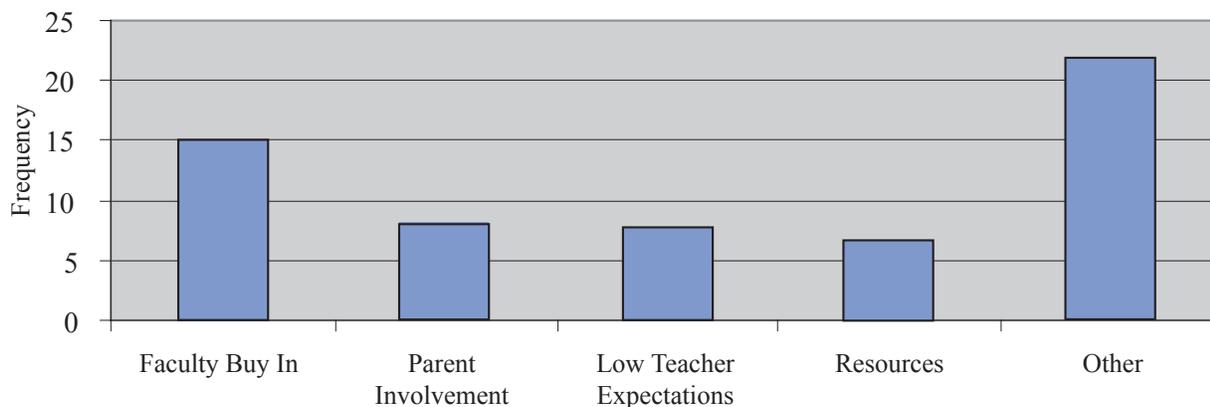


Figure 2. Number of conference participants describing a challenge in any of the five thematic categories (42 respondents total).

Reactions to the Conference

Overall, the conference was a valuable experience for participants. In fact, 85% of respondents rated its usefulness for their work as either “more than some” or “a lot” (see Figure 3).

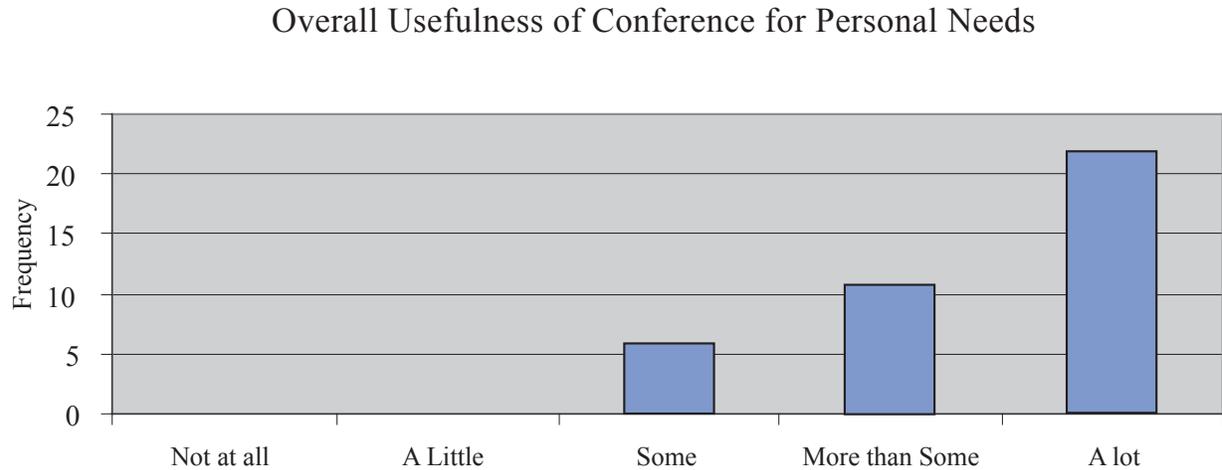


Figure 3. Number of conference participants selecting each of the five rating points for the value of the conference for their work (39 respondents total).

Attendees also provided feedback on the value of different conference activities for learning about a college going culture (see Figures 4-7). In general, participants found the conference materials provided in the folder to be useful learning materials. Both the keynote speech and the small group discussions were considered to be very useful for learning how to build a college going culture. Although many participants did not provide an answer to the question regarding the usefulness of the large group discussion, those who did respond indicated that the whole group cross talk was productive.

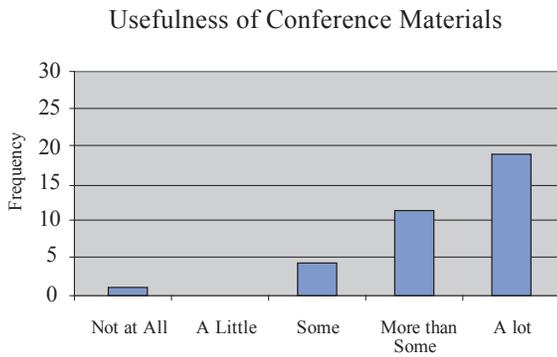


Figure 4. Number of conference participants selecting each of five rating points for the value of the conference materials for learning about a college going culture (35 respondents total).

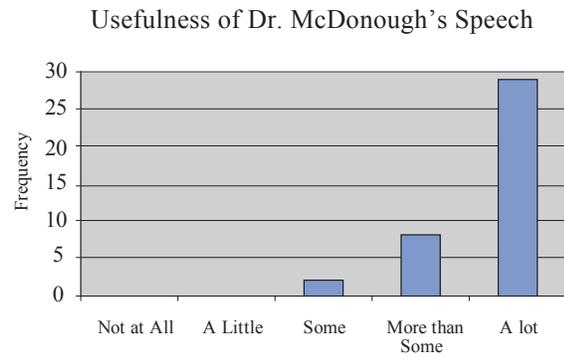


Figure 5. Number of conference participants selecting each of five rating points for the value of Dr. McDonough's speech for learning about a college going culture (39 respondents total).

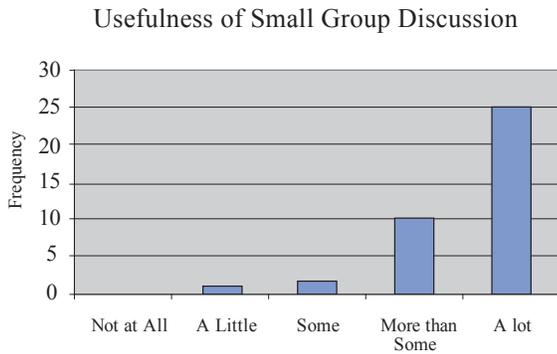


Figure 6. Number of conference participants selecting each of five rating points for the value of small group discussion for learning about a college going culture (38 respondents total).

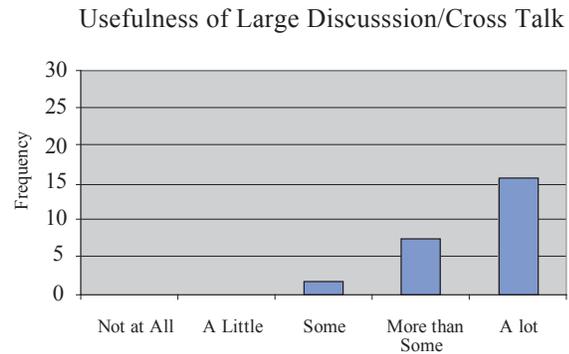


Figure 7. Number of conference participants selecting each of five rating points for the value of the large group discussion for learning about a college going culture (25 respondents total).

Next Steps for *BEST Collaboration in LA County*

The *BEST Collaboration in LA County* initiative intends to develop a regional network of partnerships focused on increasing educational opportunity, academic success, and college going for all students in Los Angeles County. The June 1st conference marks the second of a series of events hosted by the initiative. This event was well received by participants, and 86% indicated a high interest in participating in future conferences. Next steps for this initiative involve building the network, expanding the steering committee, and continuing to provide relevant resources and activities for participating collaborations.

Building the Regional Network

It is clear that building the regional network requires further effort in order to ensure success and sustainability. Six partnerships from across Los Angeles County were invited to participate in the November 10, 2005 conference. All six attended the November event, and all six were subsequently invited to the June 1st conference. Only three of the six came. As part of the effort to enlarge the network, three additional partnerships were also invited to attend the June 1st conference. LACOE Superintendent Darline Robles directly invited the three superintendents all of whom indicated their intention to participate and enthusiasm for the initiative. Only one attended the event. For those who did attend, the June 1st conference proved to be a productive experience that resulted in tangible action plans to be implemented in local high schools. Overall, the June 1st conference illustrated both the usefulness of the *BEST Collaboration in LA County* initiative and also the challenges inherent in retaining and recruiting regional partners. For this reason, retention and recruitment will be central concerns in preparing for the upcoming fall conference.

Expanding the Steering Committee

The *BEST Collaboration in LA County* initiative began with LACOE and UCLA, under the aegis of CCSESA and UC. If this initiative is to be sustained, it must be embraced by many school districts, colleges, and universities in Los Angeles County and led by a broad-based set of institutions. The November conference was a first step in creating a steering committee, and the event inspired new leaders to join the committee in planning the June 1st conference. Currently, the steering committee has representation from two public school districts, two universities, and LACOE. With each event, new leadership emerges; however, it will be an ongoing task to develop a leadership structure that sustains *BEST Collaboration in LA County* and makes it useful for our public schools.

Offering Meaningful Resources and Activities

An important factor in determining the success of the *BEST Collaboration in LA County* initiative is its ability to provide meaningful resources and ongoing activities. In terms of producing relevant resources for LA County educators, the initiative plans to release a series of reports that document the results of each conference. The first of these reports summarizes the best practices currently implemented by participating schools and institutions of higher education in their effort to build and sustain effective partnerships. A second report describes the building blocks of a college going

culture and provides action steps for creating college awareness on all high school campuses. Both reports will serve as resources for educators seeking to strengthen their partnership work and to build sustainable college going cultures in public high schools.

The educational partnership conference series provides regional collaborations with relevant networking and learning opportunities. Based on the success of the first two conferences, another conference has been planned. The November 2, 2006 event will be hosted by the USC Rossier School of Education in conjunction with LAUSD Local District 7. The focus of this conference is still being determined; however, participants from the June 1st conference made several recommendations for potential topics. The most commonly mentioned ideas included examining a successful implementation of a college going culture action plan, discussing how to build effective school-university partnerships, identifying how to increase parental involvement, and addressing the needs of particular student populations (e.g., undocumented students, special education students).

Conclusion

BEST Collaboration in LA County has initiated a promising effort to unite local educational partnerships in a regional alliance aimed at improving our schools. The success of both the November 10, 2005 and the June 1, 2006 conferences indicates that LA county collaborations are interested in learning from each other, avoiding duplication, increasing motivation, and supporting new collaborations all in the service of promoting educational success for all students across the county. With an upcoming fall conference, two conference reports completed, and two topical reports in progress, *BEST Collaboration in LA County* is actively working to sustain the initiative and continue supporting regional public schools and IHEs in their efforts to provide quality educational opportunities for public school students.

Acknowledgements

The Creating a College Going Culture Conference would not have been possible without the contributions of many people. Centinela Valley Union High School District Superintendent Cheryl White and Rae Jeane Williams from UCLA's Center X played key leadership roles in planning and implementing the event. Instrumental support was provided by other members of the steering committee including LAUSD Local District 7 Superintendent Carol Truscott, LACOE Superintendent Darline Robles, LACOE Director of Curriculum and Instructional Services Raynette Sanchez, Center X Executive Director Jody Priselac, USC Rossier School of Education Dean Karen Simms Gallagher, and UCLA Co-Chair of Academic Preparation and Educational Partnership Programs Aimée Dorr. A team of volunteers from Center X provided essential administrative support at the conference. Special thanks to keynote speaker, Patricia McDonough, for her insight in developing the theme for the conference and also for delivering an excellent presentation.