

Gateway to College

High school students get a second chance at success



Peter Zavada went to a Portland high school but never felt like he truly belonged. His grades dropped, absences were a problem and he became disengaged. He wanted a new start.

By January he was enrolled in Gateway to College, the nationally recognized Portland Community College program headquartered at the Southeast Center, that gives students a chance to earn a high school diploma and college credits at the same time.

"The whole atmosphere is different because students want to be here," said Zavada, 18. "I haven't missed a day."

Lindsey Regier, 16, of Lake Oswego excels in science and literature but didn't feel challenged at her neighborhood school.

"With Gateway it feels like I'm getting somewhere because I choose to be here and I work hard," she said.

Since opening in 2000 as the first-of-its-kind high school in the nation, Gateway to College has served nearly 1,000 students from seven local school districts who in most cases dropped out of their traditional high schools. On average, Gateway graduates earn 73 college credits by the time they complete their high school diploma requirements—about two-thirds of the way toward an associate's degree.

"We believe community colleges have a responsibility to the community and to these young people who haven't found success in their high schools," said Gateway director Linda Huddle.

The program is built on freedom and flexibility as well as structure and high standards, allowing students to be successful with the support they are given. For some students this second chance at high school is exactly what they need.

"The classes are small and there is personalized attention," said Huddle. "Because there are many different learning styles we assess how each student learns best and then give them what they need."

Adds Slava Scott, a student resource specialist and teacher who's been with the program since its inception: "Working with these students is very rewarding and as a teacher you see you're making a difference. It's exciting to work with them and not a single day is the same."

Many Gateway students have different life experiences than most high school students, such as homelessness or family problems, that make attending regular high school difficult. And while students like the freedom of studying on a college campus and being treated as an adult, they also must mature quickly and in some cases break bad habits such as not showing up for class or not finishing assignments.



Acceptance

"I feel so accepted at this school and I know I'm getting somewhere."

Kristin Olwell, 17, Portland



Atmosphere

"The whole atmosphere is different because students want to be here, I haven't missed a day."

Peter Zavada, 18, Portland

"I continually tell my students that for every choice they make there is a consequence," said Jane Larson, a student resource specialist and teacher.

During the first term, students take courses with other Gateway students that build their academic and personal skills, preparing them for college courses with the general student population. In addition to reading, writing, and math, students take a college survival and success class where they learn how to take effective notes, study for tests and juggle school, work, and family life. They also take a career development class focusing on academic goals.

Frustrated over not being able to connect with other students at her high school, Allyson LeDoux dropped out and began home schooling herself. Then she found Gateway in 2005.

"I've met so many people and developed deep connections with students who are older than me," said Ledoux, 18. "This is real life and there is not a lot of hand holding but I like being treated as an adult."

She already has 18 college credits under her belt and she hopes to double that number by the time she graduates from Gateway next year. She plans to transfer to a university, study business and eventually open a bed and breakfast inn.

For more information on Gateway to College visit www.gatewaytocollege.org. ■

PCC Replicates Pioneering Program across the Country

PCC's Gateway to College program has been awarded a new five-year, \$3 million award from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This award follows two earlier grants by the foundation, bringing the total amount received for this project to more than \$13 million.

The new grant provides PCC with the opportunity to fund planning and startup of Gateway to College at three more colleges, bringing the total to 20 sites, plus PCC.

"There is a strong demand for Gateway to College across the country, because every city has a dropout problem," said Laurel Dukehart, director of the Gateway to College National Network. "We are thrilled to have this opportunity to bring Gateway to College to more young people, as we help broker partnerships between community colleges and school districts looking for alternatives for struggling students."

The first two replication sites opened in 2004, and the national network is quickly growing. By the fall, Gateway to College will operate at 12 colleges in 10 states.

PCC selects sites to replicate the model and provides curriculum, training, and ongoing support. Nationally, more than 1,500 students have enrolled since replication began. By 2011, the end of the grant period, nearly 13,000 students will have enrolled in Gateway to College. Current sites are in Oregon (Clackamas Community College), North Carolina, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Massachusetts, Maryland, New York, Texas and California.