



## Group that helps city's students finish college is moving ahead

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By

An effort to ensure that more Cleveland students graduate from college is well under way six months after local civic leaders and educators decided to team up.

And it's clear that they have plenty of work ahead of them.

Only 136 of the 865 Cleveland school district graduates who enrolled in 14 Ohio private and public universities or at Cuyahoga Community College in 2005 had graduated six years later, according to data provided to the Higher Education Compact of Greater Cleveland.

Those compact partner institutions have developed an intervention plan they hope will increase that 16 percent graduation rate to at least 30 percent for the 1,077 Cleveland school district graduates who enrolled in college last fall, said Corinne Webb, project manager of the compact.

"People within the universities are working with the [Cleveland school district] students to help monitor and guide them through their progression and not let them move off track," she said.

Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson formed the compact, which includes the city and its school district, county government, the colleges and universities, and an array of civic groups and foundations. The program is focused on Cleveland but supporters hope to expand it other communities.

Webb said representatives from nearly all the 62 partners in the compact attended a meeting with Jackson last week to provide updates.

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They also plan to find and track students who transfer from one institution to another to make sure they eventually graduate.

The school district is encouraging all students to fill out forms for federal financial aid. The percentage of Cleveland high school graduates going to college has climbed in the past five years from 36 percent to 54 percent, according to the compact. As of mid-March, 40 percent of seniors have submitted the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

Organizations in the compact, including Esperanza and the Boys & Girls Club, have made a commitment to align their programs to support college education and graduation, Webb said.

Colleges that have signed on to the compact are Baldwin-Wallace College, Bowling Green State University, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland State University, Tri-C, Hiram College, John Carroll University, Kent State University, Notre Dame College, Oberlin College, Ohio State University, Ohio University, the University of Akron, the University of Toledo and Ursuline College.

Their leaders meet regularly and the schools are sharing information about programs they have developed to lead to student success, retention and graduation, Webb said.

"The higher education community has done an extraordinary job to provide support services to students but it requires the student to pursue and take advantage of the services," she said. "The universities are finding a proactive way to connect."

One task force formed by the compact is looking at successful programs in college readiness, access and retention. That group is organizing a June 11 symposium that will include national speakers and will be open to the public, Webb said.

Other groups are looking at creating a public/private scholarship program for students, overseeing the collection and dissemination of all data related to students in college and promoting a college-going culture in Greater Cleveland.

"This is a perfect example of how the community has come together," Webb said. "We have close to 140 people working on this in some way."

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