

# Student Success Community Conversations Summary

The Itasca Area Schools Collaborative and the Blandin Foundation co-sponsored three “community conversations” related to student success in the spring of 2010. One hundred community members participated, representing a variety of perspectives and geographic locations. Together they addressed the overarching question, “How can we help all students in the Itasca Area succeed?”

## Conversation 1: February 23, 2010

The group began by outlining the *current reality* in the Itasca Area related to student success. Participants reflected upon and shared examples of positive learning experiences they personally have had in the Itasca area, examples of student success they have observed in others, and examples of situations where they wish students were being better helped to succeed. This led to the identification of prevailing trends: key assets and challenges that families, schools, employers and community at large face related to helping students succeed. With these in mind, participants shared what gives them hope that we can better help students succeed in the future. A summary of this “current reality” exercise can be found in the February 23, 2010 meeting notes.

## Conversation 2: March 16, 2010

Participants described a *practical vision* for the future by considering the following: “It’s 2015, and we’ve had 5 successful years of progress toward helping all students succeed. What is different?” Specific answers were prioritized from the perspective of families, schools, employers and community at large. Examples of the practical vision include “parent/school cooperation”; “maximize advantages of technology”; “student-business engagement”; and “breaking the cycles: poverty and brain drain.”

The group then considered obstacles that stand between the situation today (the *current reality*) and where the group would like to see the Itasca area (the *practical vision*). Once again, answers were prioritized, taking into account the unique situations facing families, schools, employers and communities. Examples of the obstacles identified include “stressed families, low wages”; “tenure is outdated”; “no entity to facilitate communication”; and “public apathy.”

Conversation then focused on identifying promising opportunities that are available to families, schools, employers and communities. The intent was to surface opportunities “that can help move us from where we are to where we want to go”. This exercise generated dozens of responses, including “mentoring programs”; “family-friendly K-12 schools”, “parent/student/teacher involvement”; “educational paradigm shift”; “after school programs”; “win-win scholarships and internships”; and “capitalize on inherent belief in education”. A summary of the practical vision, obstacles and opportunities exercises can be found in the March 16, 2010 meeting notes.

## Conversation 3: April 13, 2010

At the final meeting, the IASC-Blandin Foundation planning team suggested a “possible way forward” that would help carry on the group’s work once the conversation series ended:

1. Identify four “strategic directions” that will act as a guide when future decisions are made about how best to support student success. A draft of the strategic directions was prepared that clustered the opportunities identified by the group during conversation 2 into themes. Suggestions for improvement were collected and will be consulted to revise the strategic outline.
2. Introduce the “Student Success Community Alliance, an intentional and influential network of community members focused on serving student success in the Itasca area. Participants volunteered

to participate in Alliance as a core team member, ally, or supporter. The core team will link efforts to maximize coordination, and will be guided by the strategic directions mentioned above.

3. Begin gauging readiness for action. Through this exercise, the group discussed how to create meaningful change by estimating the stage of readiness for families, schools, employers and community at large.

A summary of the draft strategic directions, suggestions for improvement, and readiness estimation can be in the April 13, 2010 meeting notes.

### **Next Steps**

Approximately 30 people signaled an initial interest in participating in the core team. IASC-Blandin Foundation will provide staffing and facilitation for the core team, which will meet for the first time in May. The full group will reconvene on September 28, 2010 to check in on progress.