

Advisers aim to help more poor, first-generation teens go to college

Claudette Riley, News-Leader 9 p.m. CST December 28, 2014

Anzley Arline wanted to go to college but, until a couple months ago, didn't think it was possible.

The Parkview High School senior had all but given up when he got up the courage to walk into Katie Dempsey's office.

Dempsey, a college adviser new to Parkview this year, is available to help any student navigate the college selection, admissions and financial aid processes. But she is specially trained to identify and support low-income students and teens who would be the first in their families to go to college.

"I was really frustrated and needed help. I didn't think I was financially able to go," said Arline, who now plans to study musical theater at the University of Central Missouri next year. "She helped me a lot, taking the stress off me. She has helped me find financial aid."

Springfield Public Schools partnered with the Missouri College Advisory Corps, housed at the University of Missouri-Columbia, to provide full-time college advisers at two high schools this school year. There's Dempsey at Parkview and Jenni Frier at Hillcrest.

In just four months, the two college advisers have met one-on-one with hundreds of juniors and seniors, organized college planning and financial aid workshops, set up college tours and brought in college representatives. They assisted with nearly 200 college applications and helped students secure more than \$40,000 in financial aid, nearly \$70,000 in private scholarships and the waiving of nearly \$3,000 in college application fees.

"Money — to me, that's the scariest thing, just paying for it," Arline said.

Associate Superintendent Justin Herrell said the addition of on-site college advisers is opening doors for Springfield students. "It's already showing huge impacts for us," he said.

Missouri established a college advising corps seven years ago, based on a national model, and Springfield is the first partner district in southwest Missouri. The MCAC has placed advisers in nearly 30 districts — mostly in the Kansas City and St. Louis areas — and averages a 10 percent bump in the college-going at the high schools it serves.

Herrell said the district was looking for a way to strengthen college and career planning in high schools when it heard about the program through board member Kris Callen, whose husband is a college professor. The advisers started locally in August and, based on the initial review, the district would like to expand the program to its other high schools.

"It's tremendous what's happened right out of the gate," Herrell said.

The partnership currently costs \$100,000 a year with the district paying half — or \$25,000 annually for each of the two advisers — and the MCAC covering the other half, largely through grants and donations.

Expanding the program to Springfield's three other high schools would cost another \$75,000 annually.

Clarice Fels, a senior at Parkview, wants to be a nurse but wasn't sure where to apply or what college would be a good fit. After working with Dempsey, she settled on Central Methodist University.

"I wanted to go college but I didn't really know where to start," she said. "She has made it a lot easier."

Kenneth Brown, a senior at Parkview, planned to go into the military to help pay for college and wanted to study in Colorado. He worked with Dempsey to find the University of Colorado-Boulder, which charges in-state tuition to students serving in the military.

He eventually wants to work for the U.S. Marshals so finding a college with a great criminal justice program was also important.

"She is the only person who has been pushing me to get my application in. It's crazy how much she cares," said Brown, 18, of Dempsey. "Just having her makes it easier."

Beth Tankersley-Bankhead, executive director for the MCAC, said the program works to find the best higher education "fit" for students. Despite being housed at the University of Missouri-Columbia, less than six percent enroll there.

She said gaining access to college isn't enough, the program is beefing up its support to help students stay in college and graduate.

Hillcrest Principal Garry Moore said the district has put an emphasis on college and career planning and adding the college advisers was "the niche" that was missing.

"We have a lot of first-generation college-eligible students that need this type of resource, this type of support and this has been a great program for that," he said.

The program

The Missouri College Advisory Corp, based at the University of Missouri-Columbia, is a new program developed to provide college advisers to high school students. The cost is shared by the program, through donations, and Springfield Public Schools.

The goal of the program is to "empower Missouri students to go to college and succeed" through the following:

- Help students and their families see college completion is an attainable goal.
- Provide information and assist with college planning, application and financial aid.
- Increase college enrollment, especially among first-generation college, low-income and underrepresented students.
- Provide students with knowledge and tools to persist and graduate from college.

Springfield currently has MCAC advisers at Parkview and Hillcrest high schools and would like to expand to other high schools. For more information, go to <http://mcac.missouri.edu>.

By the numbers

The Missouri College Advisory Corp has been operating in two Springfield high schools — Parkview and Hillcrest — since August. Here is what the college advisers in those schools have generated so far:

\$42,500

Financial aid secured

\$67,500

Private scholarships

\$3,000

Waived in college application fees

52

College planning workshops