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**Delta high schools launch program to boost college attainment**

*DCAN's goal is to increase post-secondary graduation rates for the students it serves*

Several high schools in the Arkansas Delta are joining forces to boost post-secondary graduation rates for students in the region.

KIPP Delta Collegiate High School, Cross County High School, and Central High School (Helena-West Helena) recently created the Delta College Attainment Network (DCAN). Supported by a grant from the Walton Family Foundation, DCAN aims to sustain and increase the number of students who attend four-year colleges and universities, increase the college persistence of graduates from participating schools, and work to ensure college graduation rates above the national average.

Through DCAN, each school will have two dedicated college advisors who will be located at each school full-time. This will allow the college advisors to be integrated into the high school community and become members of the high school staff. Students will have greater access to the support that they need; families will have access to both workshops and individual meetings with college advisors; and alumni will have robust advising throughout their college journey.

DCAN will build on successes the schools have seen in recent years. With its KIPP Through College program, KIPP Delta is seeing more than 75 percent of its graduates persisting in 2- or 4-year colleges. At Cross County, school officials have seen the college-going rate double since launching its C<sup>3</sup> (College x Career x Choice) program three years ago. At Central, a partnership with KIPP Delta has resulted in 95 percent of seniors applying to college.

“These efforts have been vital,” said Scott Shirey, executive director for KIPP Delta Public Schools. “They have shown us that with the right kinds of supports, students can rise to the occasion. But more can be done. We are excited to be able to expand this work with the DCAN program.”

DCAN will serve some of the highest poverty counties in the country, which also, not surprisingly, have among the lowest rates of high school and college completion. In the area served by DCAN, less than 14 percent of adults have college degrees. High school dropout rates top 20 percent.

“These are students who have been overlooked, underfunded, and because of geographical isolation, have limited access to resources,” said Dr. Matt McClure, chief learning and financial officer for Cross County Public Schools. “This is not due to ability but due to opportunities. With DCAN, we seek to meet the educational needs of these students by working together, because we know we cannot do this work in isolation.”

DCAN will utilize a four-tiered approach to ensure students have the following wrap-around services not only in high school, but also in college:

**Individual Advising and Support**

All juniors, seniors, and their families will receive individualized advising through the college admission and financial aid process. Once students make an informed college decision, they will receive support through the transition to college. As alumni of DCAN, students will receive an alumni advisor who will work with them to help them navigate financial aid issues, ensure they are taking advantage of the support services on their campus, and work with administration to ensure students have a sense of belonging on campus.

### **Family/Community Engagement**

DCAN will offer informational programming and individualized family meetings as a means to share the wealth of information and give concrete ways for families and community to support students through their post-secondary decisions. One goal will be to dispel myths that exist about certain schools.

### **College, Career, and Leadership Experiences**

DCAN students will have the opportunity to experience different colleges, professional organizations, and careers. The intent is to increase students' ability to visualize being a part of those communities. Additional opportunities such as summer programs, community service, college fly-ins, and internships will also be included.

### **Post-Secondary Options**

Members of the DCAN team will work to ensure students graduate from their college/university or training program. The Alumni Advising Team (A-Team) will work in tandem with colleges/universities to provide resources and support students have what they need to not only survive but thrive in the college atmosphere. DCAN will also work to build relations with companies, organizations, and state departments to find and create additional opportunities for student internships and employment.

School officials are hopeful to expand DCAN membership in the future, with the goal of serving more students and schools in the Delta.

KIPP Delta a network of six college-preparatory, charter schools serving the Delta region of Arkansas. KIPP schools are free, public schools, and enrollment is open to all students. KIPP Delta has a 15-year track record of helping students in educationally underserved communities develop the knowledge, skills, and character strengths they need for success in college and life.

Cross County High School is a public, district conversion charter high school. Its goal is for graduates to think analytically, solve problems creatively, utilize technology appropriately, collaborate effectively, and communicate articulately. Partnered with the New Tech Network, the school focuses on educating the whole child by preparing them to be lifelong learners and responsible citizens in a global society.

Central High School is part of the Helena-West Helena School District. Its mission is to produce graduates who are fully prepared for life after school as productive, responsible, and caring citizens.

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