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# **Low-Income, First-Generation Students**

**AIM Institute Programs in the Metropolitan Area**

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For several years, AIM has actively worked with the Omaha metropolitan-area school districts to support and encourage postsecondary educational opportunities for area youth. Nearly all of these programs have an information technology focus. However, perhaps the greatest emphasis is the need for higher education. As business activities, society and culture move deeper into the information age, the individual's ability to be competitive in the employment market of the future will rest on his/her ability to bring intellectual content and contribution to the positions created by employers.

Unfortunately not all secondary students are achieving the levels of academic performance that many employers seek in future employees. Yes, most young people can handle consumer-type devices and tools today but that is not enough. Proficiency in these devices may not include the content knowledge, analytical ability, judgment, and a variety of other intellectual development experiences that formal educational processes hone.

## National Educational Achievement

Today, national statistics reveal that the “event” dropout rate during the school year 2004-05 was 3.9% for all 9<sup>th</sup>- through 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students. The “event” dropout rate measures the percentage of 9<sup>th</sup>- through 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students that drop out of school during the academic year. Both Iowa and Nebraska reported lower “event” dropout rates of 2.1% and 2.8%, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

Another term is the “status” dropout rate, which measures the percentage of high school dropouts among persons 16 through 24 years old. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 9.3% of American youth in that age bracket were not enrolled in school and have not completed a high school program in 2006.<sup>2</sup>

A third measure of secondary school achievement is the average freshman graduation rate for public high school students. This rate is the number of high school graduates divided by the estimated number of freshmen four years earlier. In 2004-05 the estimated freshman graduation rate was 74.7%. Both Iowa and Nebraska students performed much better than the national average. Iowa's average freshman graduation rate was 86.6% while Nebraska's average freshman graduation rate was the highest in the nation for 2004-05 at 87.8%.<sup>3</sup>

These aggregate numbers tend to mask different performance rates by income and ethnicity. The following table shows the status dropout rates for 16-24-year-olds by different groups of individuals in the U.S. as of October 2006.

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<sup>1</sup> *National Center for Educational Statistics*, 2007 Tables and Figures, Table 103 Public high school graduates and dropouts, by race/ethnicity and state or jurisdiction, school years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005. [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07\\_103asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_103asp)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, Table 106 Percentage of high school dropouts among persons 6 through 24 years old, school year 2006, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07\\_106asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_106asp)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, Secondary Persistence and Progress, Table 21-1 Averaged freshman graduation rate for public high school students and the number of graduates, by state: School years 2000-01 through 2004-05. <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2008/section3/table.asp?tableID=896>

**Table 1**

<b>National Status Dropout Rates for Youth 16-24 Years of Age<sup>4</sup> October 2006</b>	
<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Status Dropout Rate (percent)</b>
<b>U.S. Total</b>	9.3%
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	10.3%
Female	8.3%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
White	5.8%
Black	10.7%
Hispanic	22.1%
Asian	3.7%
American Indian/Alaska Native	14.7%
More Than One Race	7.0%
<b>Age</b>	
16	2.8%
17	5.0%
18	8.6%
19	9.7%
20-24	11.8%
<b>Family Income</b>	
Lowest Quartile	16.5%
Middle Low Quartile	12.1%
Middle High Quartile	6.3%
High Quartile	3.8%

The data further show that these status dropouts have relatively low labor-market participation. Only 56.4% of the status dropout individuals between 16 and 24 years of age are employed. Meanwhile, 11.7% are unemployed and 33.0% are not in the labor force. The national data also show 18.9% had less than nine years of school, 3.4% had completed the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 21.4% had completed the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and 43.9% had either 11 or 12 years of schooling.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, Table 23-2 Status dropout rates of status dropouts ages 16-24, by selected Characteristics, October 2006. <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2008/section3/table.asp?tableID=901>, Tables and Figures, Table 106 Percentage of high school dropouts among persons 16 through 24 years old by income level and percentage distribution of status and educational attainment: 1970 through 2006.

From a national perspective, as we enter the information age, it is important for a greater percentage of students to graduate from high school. Of those that graduate, it is also important that greater percentages decide to seek postsecondary education. From an historical perspective, the number of high school graduates who enrolled in college had increased from 33.7% in 1967 to an all-time high of 46.8% in 2005. In 2006, the percentage of high school graduates who enrolled in postsecondary education declined to 45.0%. The reason for this decline was not stated. These enrollment rates varied by gender and by race/ethnicity, however, as shown below.

**Table 2**

<b>Postsecondary Enrollment As a Percentage of All Youth 18-24 Years of Age Completing High School<sup>5</sup></b>						
Year	Total (percent)	Gender		Race/Ethnicity		
		Male	Female	Caucasian	African-American	Hispanic
1967	33.7%	44.7%	25.1%	34.5%	23.3%	n/a
1977	32.5%	35.6%	29.7%	32.3%	31.3%	31.5%
1987	36.2%	38.3%	34.4%	37.3%	29.5%	28.4%
1997	45.2%	44.0%	46.3%	46.6%	39.5%	36.0%
2006	45.0%	42.2%	47.7%	46.5%	42.0%	35.5%

Culture and economic status also impact the postsecondary educational achievement of students. One such group is low-income and first-generation students. The Pell Institute defines low-income students as those from families with family incomes below \$25,000 annually.<sup>6</sup> The Pell Institute defines first-generation students as those whose parents may have had some college, postsecondary certificate and associate's degrees but not a bachelor's degree. Other studies define first-generation students as those whose parents have no education beyond high school.<sup>7</sup>

Postsecondary outcomes six years after high school graduation varied significantly for low-income, first-generation students, according to national data presented by the Pell Institute in its 2008 study entitled *Moving Beyond Access: College Success for Low-Income, First-Generation Students*. The following data shows that success in college for low-income, first-generation students, as measured by the attainment of a certificate, AA degree or a baccalaureate degree six years after high school graduation, is well below students that are not low-income or first-generation.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, Table 195. Enrollment rates of 18-24-year-olds in degree-granting institutions, by sex and race/ethnicity; 1967 through 2006. [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07\\_195.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_195.asp)

<sup>6</sup> The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education "Moving Beyond Access: College Success for Low-Income, First-Generation Students" Washington D.C, Page 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, P. 8.

**Table 3**

Secondary Outcomes Six Years After High School Graduation <sup>8</sup>			
All Institutions	Low-Income First-Generation	Low-Income or First-Generation	Not Low-Income and Not First-Generation
Certificate or AA	32%	21%	11%
Attained BA	11%	26%	55%
Still Enrolled	13%	16%	15%
Not Enrolled	43%	38%	20%

### Omaha Public Schools Findings

In September 2008 the Omaha Public Schools (OPS) published a study entitled, *Follow-up of 2007 High School Graduates*. The findings in this study are based upon a telephone survey of 2007 graduates from OPS high schools. In 2007, 2,428 students graduated from eight OPS high schools. The telephone survey was conducted between March and June of 2008. A total of 1,943 or 80% of the 2007 graduates were contacted. While the statistics collected are not exactly consistent with the data from either the Federal Pell Study or the National Center for Educational Statistics, there is a significant degree of consistency in the OPS findings and the national data.

“A total of 1,180, or 60.7% of the graduates contacted, attended colleges, universities, trade schools, or work-related training during the fall of 2007. A total of 1,190, or 61.2% of graduates contacted, were attending colleges, universities, trade schools, or work-related training during the spring of 2008. The fall attendance rate is lower than the national enrollment percentage (66.7%) reported by the National Center for Educational Statistics.”<sup>9</sup>

The percentage of OPS spring 2007 graduates enrolled in postsecondary education in the fall of 2007 also varied by ethnicity. And, with the exception of African American students, all ethnic groups rate of enrollment in postsecondary institutions was below national averages.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, P.12 note: The Pell study defined low-income as family income below \$25,000 because students from families with incomes above that amount are not usually eligible for Federal Pell Grants and TRIO programs. The most recent median family income for Pell Grant recipients is \$17,217. The Pell study's definition of first-generation students included students whose parents may have had some college, postsecondary certificate and associate's degrees but not a bachelor's degree. Other studies define first-generation students as those whose parents have no education beyond high school.

<sup>9</sup> “*Follow-up of 2007 High School Graduates*”, Omaha Public Schools, September 2008, page 3.

**Table 4**

<b>Fall 2007 Postsecondary Enrollment Rates<sup>10</sup> for Spring 2007 OPS High School Graduates</b>			
<b>Class</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>All Students</b>
All Graduates	66.5%	54.9%	61.0%
Caucasian	72.5%	57.8%	65.3%
African American	60.6%	53.3%	57.5%
Hispanic	49.6%	42.2%	46.1%
Asian	93.7%	73.9%	82.1%
Native American	60.0%	35.7%	45.8%

The OPS study also estimated the different attendance rates for low-income students based upon whether or not the student participated in the schools' free/reduced-price lunch program. "Approximately 69% of the full-price lunch students contacted for this survey are currently enrolled in postsecondary education, opposed to 50% of the free/reduced-price lunch students."<sup>11</sup>

### **AIM Partnerships with Area Schools**

These national and local data clearly show that, on average, the low-income, first-generation student does not achieve the level of academic accomplishment as their less disadvantaged peers. Since 2003, AIM has been awarded and has managed various federal and foundation grants designed to work directly with area school districts to adequately prepare low-income, first-generation students for postsecondary educational success. In addition, AIM has a unique scholarship program that awards college scholarships to area 8<sup>th</sup> grade low-income, first-generation students. The objective of these scholarships is to raise expectations for these students to complete their high school education and to enroll in college upon graduation. The scholarships are \$1,000 paid annually when the student enrolls in college and remains in good academic standing each successive year.

The data, to date, reveals that the AIM programs have been very successful in achieving the stated objectives to assure more local students are prepared academically, socially and economically for postsecondary educational opportunities. To date, 124 students have been enrolled in AIM's College Bound Club between 2003 and 2008. A total of 74 students have graduated from high school. These 74 students represent nearly a 100% graduation rate. There are 50 students still in the program ranging in grades 9 through 12.

This outcome is well above both national and local high school graduation rates for low-income and first-generation students. Of those 74 students who graduated, 73% were both low-income and first-generation students, 22% were first-generation students and 5% were low-income.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, page 11.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, page 3.

There were 43 female and 31 male students who graduated from area high schools. Caucasian students accounted for 72% of the graduates. Asian, Latino, Native Americans, and African Americans accounted for the remaining 28% of the graduates.

We are encouraged that of the 74 students who have graduated, 52 or 71% enrolled in college. Today, 35 or nearly 68% are still enrolled. These enrollment and retention rates are well above national statistics reported earlier in this report, which stated that 43% of all low-income and first-generation students were not enrolled six years after high school graduation. While it is too early to have accurate six-year outcomes for AIM's College Bound Club Program, two of those students have already completed a postsecondary program and are gainfully employed.

Most of the students who have participated in AIM's College Bound Club Program have chosen to attend local postsecondary institutions. Those schools are listed in the table below.

**Table 5**

<b>Local Postsecondary Institutions            Attended by College Bound Club Participants</b>	
Name of Institution	Number Attended
Metropolitan Community College	24
University of Nebraska at Omaha	5
University of Nebraska - Lincoln	5
Iowa Western Community College	3
Clarkson School of Nursing	2
Bellevue University	2
Southeast Community College	1
Creighton University	1
Nebraska Wesleyan	1

The list of non-local colleges includes one student each attending the following schools.

**Table 6**

<b>Non-Local Postsecondary Institutions Attended by College Bound Club Participants</b>	
<b>Name of Institution</b>	<b>Number Attended</b>
Syracuse University	1
Troy State	1
Northwest Missouri State	1
South Dakota School of Mines	1
Missouri State	1
Rockhurst University – Kansas City	1
Ellsworth Community College	1
Hamilton College	1

By every measure, AIM's College Bound Club Program is highly successful in achieving its objectives in helping most students prepare for the challenges of the information age. As stated before, the employer of the future will expect employees to work effectively in the emerging information age. It will be challenging and rewarding to the prepared worker.

The last few decades have created an evolution within our workforce, the likes of which we have not seen before. Education is paramount to this change, and partnerships with education remain critical. The AIM Institute will continue to develop and maintain partnerships in our community as we remain steadfast in our mission to transform communities, organizations and individuals through technology.