

# DOINGWHATWORKS



Audio

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## A District-Level Mission to Improve College Access

Cynthia K. Barron, Ph.D., and Gloria L. Purifoy • March 2010

Topic: Helping Students Navigate the Path to College  
Practice: College Entry Steps

### Highlights

- Administrators at Chicago Public Schools explain how they use data to help schools increase college access.
- Setting goals, thinking about what activities will help schools meet these goals, and then continually monitoring progress has helped them improve their rate of college enrollment.
- Administrators also monitor how students are doing after they leave high school—specifically, if they enrolled in college as planned and how long they stayed in college.
- Parents are an integral part of increasing college access, especially for first-generation students. To engage parents, schools have frequent events to inform them of the college-going process. They also personalize the events by linking the process to their student's specific progress (e.g., their student's ACT scores, course taking, specific college interests).

## About the Interviewees

### **Cythina K. Barron, Ph.D.**

Dr. Cynthia K. Barron has over 39 years' experience with the Chicago Public Schools as a teacher, athletic coach, counselor, principal of two schools (elementary and secondary), area instruction officer, and interim chief area officer for High School Area 25. Dr. Barron presents nationally for ACT regarding college readiness, course rigor, and student preparation. She currently leads the high school redesign work for the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) Urban Education Leadership Ed.D. Program and serves as a UIC school leadership coach.

### **Gloria L. Purifoy**

Gloria L. Purifoy is a college and career specialist with the Chicago Public Schools in the Department of College and Career Preparation (DCCP). Since 2004, she has supported over 25 different high schools in three area offices, partnering with high school administrators, counseling teams, and school staff to develop a strategic plan and school infrastructure to increase postsecondary outcomes for college access and enrollment. Under the DCCP pillars of college awareness, readiness, access, and success, Ms. Purifoy has helped schools develop data-driven postsecondary action plans to assist students and families from freshman through senior year, including offering year-round college, career, and financial information and workshop sessions for students and parents; campus visits in partnership with colleges and universities; and the development of fully equipped college and career resource centers.

## Full Transcript

**Cynthia Barron:** My name is Dr. Cynthia Barron, and I am currently a principal leadership coach for the University of Illinois at Chicago in the Urban Leadership Program. I am the former chief area officer for the Chicago Public Schools since 2002, supervising more than 50 high schools during various periods of my tenure.

**Gloria Purifoy:** Hi, my name is Gloria Purifoy. I am a college and career specialist with Chicago Public Schools, Department of College and Career Preparation.

**Barron:** Our goal in Chicago Public Schools is definitely to ensure that each and every one of our students graduate postsecondary-ready. We start the postsecondary access, college-readiness access, as early as elementary school, ensuring that at each and every step of the way that we are making sure that all the steps for college readiness are in place.

**Purifoy:** The Chicago Public School Systems have really worked hard to build a foundation based on research and data to really determine how our students are doing in their pursuit and preparing for college. We have worked with the State of Illinois to implement a college and career planning and tracking tool called What's

Next Illinois. This allows our students to go on and explore a variety of college and career options to actually even apply for colleges, scholarships online through this program, to do early financial needs analysis like the EFC, or the Expected Family Contribution calculator. And we actually are able to track that data within the system. Every student has their own personal portfolio, so we can report back to schools the percentage of their students who are actually developing a four-year college and career plan. Schools can actually track that data in-house through a professional tool section. Every school has their own personal account that they can utilize to go in and see exactly what students are doing and to help guide them through the college and career planning process. So these are a few examples of the way we use our research and data analysis tools to drive our postsecondary planning process with our schools and our students.

Barron: Every week, our chief executive officer, Mr. Huberman, sends area administrators, people like myself, a report very clearly and he goes down that report and says, "Which schools have made progress on FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid]? Which schools are not making progress? What is the rate of each area? And suggestions for what we need to do for the next step?"

Purifoy: Parent engagement is a critical piece of the college planning process. Many of our students are first-generational students. We try to engage parents in multiple ways at the school level. Counselors and college and career coaches are holding college planning nights for parents. We invite parents to come in and learn about the various college opportunities, to learn about where their student is in the college planning process, what schools they are applying for. They are going through all the steps with them: how they are academically on track to graduate, how their grades and their ACT scores tie into their options and what they are able to access, helping them to know and understand when the college application deadlines are, how they go about navigating that process.

Barron: We have had a couple of initiatives in the Chicago Public Schools that started, I think, in 2008 and that was the summer transition counselor. Counselors could come in during the summer, really help to make sure that those students who were accepted at colleges and universities—or even those students who, something happened and maybe they weren't accepted right away, they still had pieces to fill out—that they made that transition. We found that to be very effective.

Purifoy: Through our partnership with the National Student Clearinghouse, we are actually able to provide yearly college enrollment reports that tell our students, that tell our schools, that tell our parents where your student has planned to go, here is where they ended, they actually enrolled in this institution. And as long as we have a student's valid Social Security Number, we can track and trace those students in whichever college they enroll in. These pieces of data are what we use to tell a story to our schools, the brutal truth of how our students may not be accessing the institutions of fit, of match, as they should. The wonderful work that they are doing when we are seeing our college enrollment grow by leaps and bounds.

Barron: We ask parents and our students, it's not necessarily what your ACT score is, not necessarily what your achievement scores are, but are you college-ready, and what's it going to take to get there? And so I

think that's why we have made so much progress as a district because we have ways to measure our growth in a lot of the key indicators, and we are being very intentional about our efforts.