

I am extremely pleased with the outcome of the AHSI High School to Career & College Mini Convening/Big Picture Learning CTC Retreat. We had a wonderful time engaging in valuable knowledge exchange. The purpose of this summary is to provide you with a brief overview of the convening and highlight a few key moments. A full length report can be found on iBackup.

This particular convening marked several firsts for both groups. This was the first time the AHSI workgroup members convened with the Big Picture Learning College Transition Counselors (CTCs). This was the first time for a school site to host both the AHSI career & college workgroup and the CTCs. Additionally this was the first time a convening or retreat was held in Indianapolis, IN. Despite an abundance of cold weather and snow, the two groups came together eager to take advantage of the sessions and activities. Because we anticipated poor weather and some late arrivals it was intended for our first evening to be light, without a large focus on specific content. We began our time together with a befitting exercise that allowed participants an opportunity to get acquainted with one another and their work. Having an opportunity to share our successes and learn of others' successes set the stage for what was to come. Over the next day and a half we spent time learning about the Big Picture Longitudinal study, discussing our career and college services and moving forward with specific workgroup initiatives.

We had the fortunate opportunity to spend our first full day at Indianapolis Metropolitan High School (Indy Met). Indy Met is a Big Picture Learning school now in its fifth year. Indy Met has a wonderful group of dedicated students. Although school was cancelled due to weather conditions, a group of student ambassadors graciously came to school to be welcoming hosts and lead tours around Indy Met's newly renovated facilities. Another highlight to our visit at Indy Met was the in depth overview of the school's programs and services. Learning about Indy Met's career and college services, school structure and resources led us into a great session focused on specific in progress work and initiatives. Participants had an opportunity to share their career & college preparatory programs and services with specific interest paid to entry, mid-point and exit strategies and/or components.

Moving forward, Karen Arnold, principal investigator for the Big Picture Longitudinal Study, shared the latest findings of the study, specifically, the implications for working with first-generation low income students. Some of the initial findings from the study indicate that Big Picture School graduates rate their high school experience very highly, especially in terms of relationships with advisors, usefulness of internships, personal growth, and preparation for college attendance. Eighty-seven percent of 2006 graduates indicated in June that they planned to begin college in the following fall. However, the study has found that several students' plans changed and the network experienced a "summer flood" of students not attending college the following fall.

To close our day at Indy Met we engaged in short debrief session. Some of the “wow’s” and “wonders” included: “Wow, we all share a lot of the same struggles.” “Wow, what a great network of resources we are a part of.” “I wonder how to motivate the ‘unmotivated’.” “I wonder how I can effectively bring back data to my school and help enact change.”

To bring our eventful and productive day to a close, participants had an opportunity to tour the Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) campus. Additionally we were pleased to have Claire King, Associate Director of Indiana University’s Center for Research and P-16 Collaboration, provide a keynote presentation focusing on developing and cultivating partnerships between secondary schools, community-based organizations, networks such as AHSI, and institutions of higher education. Claire noted that as secondary schools approach colleges and universities with a “menu” of requests. She noted that colleges and universities have a plethora of resources such as materials (old computers, books), facilities and potential researchers etc.

On Friday, the AHSI workgroup spent the morning focusing on the specific desired result and deliverables for the workgroup. After debriefing the previous nights keynote presentation we took time to briefly review the workgroup results framework and three current initiatives: the literature review, post secondary database and the “one-pager” feedback. It is always valuable to have face-to-face time with one another. We were able to discuss the current initiatives and identify realistic next steps for our work together.

Overall, we had an energizing and informative convening. This convening proved once again how valuable and enriching it is to have a network of similar organizations working together to improve practice as we provide the best possible services for students and families.