

MAFAA Early Awareness 2008 – 09 Year End Committee Report

By Vicki Larson

This is the final report for the 2008 – 09 academic year for the Early Awareness Committee. It has been another successful year for the committee as we expanded the Kids, Colleges, and Careers to two new locations.

The committee's annual events, "Exploring the Possibilities: Kids, College and Careers" (KCC) continues to be one of the highlight for the group. We have committed members that put in many hours to ensure that the events are successful for both the Minneapolis and St. Paul events. The Minneapolis event was hosted by MCTC and the St. Paul event was hosted by St. Paul College. The KCC events reach out to disadvantaged eight graders from Minneapolis and St. Paul and are designed to show the participants that college is possible. "Kids, Colleges and Careers" encourages students to consider post-secondary options and provides them a brief overview of the planning for college process. The festivities included a morning workshop on the admissions process, financial aid, and the importance of goal setting. The program engages students through break-out sessions, a campus tour, and a student panel discussion. Involving his audience with cheers, actions, anecdotes, and thoughtful reflection, Tou Ger Xiong, a Hmong speaker and rap artist, motivates the students to relish the differences of varied cultures. We faced an unexpected impact to our numbers at our St. Paul event, held on November 4, 2008 – it was election day (a historic election) and many schools decided to have election day events , thus lowering our turnout.

As I referenced at the beginning of this report, the Early Awareness committee expanded the KCC event to two new locations – Mankato and Duluth – both fully funded through grants from Great Lakes. Trish Johnson with the help of Jeanne Wesley both St. Scholastica secured grant funding to host the first KCC event in Duluth. They had 200 students in attendance from one school. Students were fully engaged in Tou Ger Xiong's presentations and enjoyed the various breakout sessions. The principal of the school attended at was very impressed both with the quality of the programming and the sheer logistics of managing a group of that size.

Tracy Stokes-Hernandez secured funding for the Mankato event. Two area schools attended, bringing about 50 students. The students had a wonderful time. The advisors, after being leery of committing to

an event with which they were unfamiliar, were enthusiastic with participating next year and helping with any planning. It is likely that both the number of students and schools wishing to participate will increase.

The committee also has maintained the MAFAA Focus on the Future (FOTF) curriculum. Teachers have found great value in this curriculum in that the lesson plans are ready for them and they satisfy some of the mandatory teaching areas. This year has been a bit more challenging with having schools participate (as best we can tell) and I think part of that had to do with the transition to me as chair and not being as familiar with this program. Also, there are teachers who utilize the curriculum each year and do not always report to us that they are doing so. Promotional items will soon be sent to each school and many of those schools will be participating in a field trip to a college or university in their area. Some schools have chosen to bypass the field trip because they just don't have time and that has worked well since there are schools who have hosted trips in the past who are no longer able to. The committee is looking to evaluate this for the coming year to see if and how this should change.

Looking ahead, we are hoping to continue the work of making the KCC event a "packaged" event that can be done just about anywhere in the state. We will continue evaluating the FOTF curriculum and find ways to further promote the program. As stated earlier we will also evaluate the idea of college campus tours upon completion of the curriculum.

It has been a real pleasure to chair Early Awareness in 2008-09. The members of the committee are dedicated to raising awareness of college as an option for young kids and help them realize that college is possible. Going to Early Awareness meetings are a highlight each month and it is gratifying that people want to continue to serve – it tells me how fulfilling this work is for each person.