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**LEARNING COMMUNITIES PROGRAM
BOOSTS ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH
FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

***Early Results from the Opening Doors Demonstration at
Kingsborough Community College Show Improved Course and
Test Pass Rates***

(New York) — During their first semester at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, New York, students in a program called Opening Doors Learning Communities substantially outperformed students in a comparison group who were not in the program. According to a new study from MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, the students in the program achieved higher course pass rates, particularly in English. Also, they were more likely to have completed remedial English requirements: Among students who had failed both a reading and writing test prior to enrollment, 33 percent who were in the program had passed both tests one year later, compared with just 14 percent of students who had not participated in the program.

Kingsborough's program revolves around small learning communities, in which up to 25 first-semester students form a cohort, together taking three "linked classes" — courses in different subjects (including English) that are closely related in terms of scheduling and content. In addition, Kingsborough offers students in the Opening Doors program enhanced tutoring, extra counseling, and vouchers to purchase books.

The study, *Building Learning Communities: Early Results from the Opening Doors Demonstration at Kingsborough Community College*, comes as community colleges are struggling with a serious challenge: while almost half of all American undergraduate students attend community colleges, the U.S. Department of Education has reported that 46 percent of students who begin postsecondary studies at a community college do not

complete a degree or do not enroll elsewhere within six years. And, while they are enrolled, many community college students require remedial classes in English or math.

“Opening Doors appears to have already made an immediate difference for students at Kingsborough Community College,” says Dan Bloom, coauthor of the report. “The challenge will be to see if these early positive results can translate into more students staying in school and completing their degrees, the key goal of the program.” Despite the positive effects on passing English courses and tests, the learning communities so far have not led to any difference in students remaining in school (although this could change as additional follow-up data are collected).

What Is Opening Doors?

The Opening Doors Demonstration is designed to show how community colleges can implement reforms that help more low-income students remain in school and improve other outcomes, including degree attainment, labor market success, and personal and social well-being. As a second report being released from MDRC describes, there are currently six community colleges in the country participating in Opening Doors:

- Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, New York
- Lorain County Community College in Elyria, Ohio (west of Cleveland)
- Owens Community College in Toledo, Ohio
- Delgado Community College in New Orleans, Louisiana
- The West Jefferson campus of the Louisiana Technical College in Harvey, Louisiana (a suburb of New Orleans)
- Chaffey College in Rancho Cucamonga, California (in San Bernardino County)

While the structure of the Opening Doors project varies from campus to campus, all projects are testing various combinations of innovations in three areas: (1) enhanced curricula and instruction, (2) supplementary financial aid, and (3) improved student services, including counseling, tutoring, and academic advising.

Opening Doors is path breaking for another reason: It will be the first community college demonstration evaluated with a random assignment research design, widely considered to be the “gold standard” in determining whether interventions work. MDRC is comparing a program group of students who received Opening Doors services with a control group that did not.

“A postsecondary credential is becoming a prerequisite for admission to the American middle class,” notes Thomas Brock, Opening Doors Project Director and coauthor of the second report, *Promoting Student Success in Community College and Beyond: The Opening Doors Demonstration*. “Community colleges, with their open admissions, convenient locations, and relatively modest cost, serve as a gateway to postsecondary education for many low-income and disadvantaged students.”

“While it is too early to know for sure whether Opening Doors will lead to lasting change for low-income students, this early success should provide hope to the nation’s 1,200 community colleges — and the millions of students they serve,” concludes MDRC Senior Vice President Robert Ivry.

For copies of the two reports, or to set up an interview with an expert from MDRC, contact John Hutchins, (212) 340-8604 or john.hutchins@mdrc.org. To interview representatives of Kingsborough Community College, contact Donald Kaplan, (212) 843-8065, dkaplan@rubenstein.com.

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Headquartered in New York City, with a regional office in Oakland, CA, MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization with 30 years of experience designing and evaluating education and social policy initiatives.

The funders for the Opening Doors project include the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Ford Foundation, George Gund Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, Joyce Foundation, KnowledgeWorks Foundation, Lumina Foundation for Education, MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Socioeconomic Status and Health, MacArthur Foundation Research Network on the Transitions to Adulthood, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Princeton University Industrial Relations Section, Robin Hood Foundation, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Labor, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and William T. Grant Foundation.