

As the Hibbing Community College TRIO Upward Bound Director, and as the MN TRIO Association President-Elect, I am proud to have the opportunity to speak for the low income, first generation TRIO students in Minnesota. In particular, I am happy to discuss the ways in which TRIO programs impact students in rural areas such as the Minnesota Iron Range, where Hibbing Community College is located.

The Iron Range region of Minnesota is blessed with natural resources that once traditionally afforded well-paying, yet low skill jobs in the mining industry that only required a high school diploma. Advances in technology now demand higher educational requirements for regional job opportunities. TRIO programs provide participants with the vision and tools to pursue postsecondary education levels that meet new employment standards in the region and allow students to be competitive in today's global job market.

The TRIO programs in the region provide critical services to students such as tutoring, academic advising, financial literacy, college visits, college entrance exam preparation, supplemental instruction, assistance in filling out college and scholarship applications as well as the FAFSA, and career exploration including job shadowing and mentors.

I'd like to tell you about one northeastern Minnesota Upward Bound student who exemplifies the ripple effect that TRIO programs have. Tony Ellis joined the Itasca Community College Upward Bound program in high school and went on to earn an engineering degree from the University of Minnesota Duluth. He is now Lead Engineer at Essar Steel, a new mining company on the Iron Range. His younger brother also joined Upward Bound and earned his BA at Mankato State University. Their mother also followed suit and is now working on her BA. Generations of this family and hundreds of other TRIO alumni families will now earn higher wages, provide stable homes, and become productive, contributing citizens to the regional economy thanks to rural TRIO programs in northeastern Minnesota.

Northeastern Minnesota TRIO students encounter challenges unique to living in a rural, low-income region. Students often do not have reliable personal transportation and public transportation is nearly non-existent. Students in rural areas also face obstacles with the lack of access to technology. Many low income, rural students do not have internet access or even computers at home.

Not only do TRIO programs provide the academic services I discussed earlier, but TRIO programs also transport students to important academic activities and provide computer availability. But possibly the most impactful skills that TRIO programs teach students are how to identify their resources, advocate for themselves, and take advantage of every possible opportunity in their education. These skills help students problem-solve when they cannot find a ride to an ACT exam or when their dial-up internet connection doesn't work at their rural home.

Access to postsecondary institutions in rural areas is a massive barrier for students to pursue degrees higher than an Associate's. On the Iron Range, for example, the closest universities are

75 to 200 miles away. TRIO families do not have the time or resources to visit distant colleges. Without TRIO programs these students may never dream of attaining a Bachelor's degree because they have never had the opportunity to step foot on a university campus, let alone know how to prepare for and apply to such an institution.

TRIO programs are critical advocates for low income, first generation students on college campuses. TRIO personnel can educate and alert college administration, faculty, and student services staff to the specific needs of these students. Ultimately, TRIO programs are essential resources to colleges as these institutions learn how to better recruit for and successfully serve low income, first generation students.

Simply put, TRIO programs make truly tremendous strides in providing equal post-secondary educational opportunities to low income, first generation students. Providing equal college access to rural students betters the whole community.

Respectfully submitted by Ms. Tallie Sertich, Upward Bound Director Hibbing Community College and MN TRIO President-Elect

1/14/2014