

May 2015

By Erich Thurow, Chairman D200 Education Foundation

One of the newest student organizations in District 200 is the Future Latino Leaders group. FLL has members at both Woodstock and Woodstock North high schools. Each school has approximately 30 students involved; they are seniors who based on grade point and recommendations from school staff are invited to be a part of the group.

This spring, 28 juniors, the core of next year's FLL group, along with four staff members went on a multi-college visit funded in part by a grant from the D200 Education Foundation. On this trip, the students visited the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, Marquette University, U. W.-Milwaukee and Carthage College. The students met with admissions representatives of each school and got a walking tour of the campuses in order to provide them with background and experiences prior to them beginning the college application process.

District 200 Career Facilitator Amanda Harmer submitted the grant application last fall and began planning the trip when the grant that covered about half the expenses was approved. "Visiting the colleges is an important step in the post-secondary process," said Ms. Harmer. "We also wanted the students to get exposed to different types of schools, both public and private and in both urban and rural settings." Another trip is planned for the fall that will take students to several Illinois universities including Northern Illinois, Illinois State and Illinois Wesleyan.

Ms. Harmer stressed the importance of the visits to the students. She pointed out that "These students will be the first in their families to attend college and families can't choose a college based on a brochure or what they read on the Internet." She added, "They have to experience the campus and see how it fits with what they want." According to Ms. Harmer, "Before the visits, only a couple of the students had considered one of the four schools, but by the end of the trip, all the students said they would consider applying to the colleges."

Future Latino Leaders wants to expand this opportunity and offer it to other students in the community. The experience prepares students for visiting schools on their own or with family members; it trains them to know the questions to ask about academics, student life and extra-curricular activities. Throughout the year FLL assists students in college searches, researching scholarship opportunities, developing resumes and completing FAFSA paperwork. The group also brings in guest speakers to talk about leadership, business and the importance of college and it holds mock interviews with the students.

I am delighted that the Education Foundation was able to fund this and 80 other requests in whole or in part this year. Our organization is planning an ice cream social on the square this month (June 17th) as part of the City Band Concert. Donations received at that event will add to the funds available for next fall's grants. Donations can also be sent to the District 200 Education Foundation, P.O. Box 172, Woodstock, IL, 60098 any time of the year.