

what *we*

KNOW

REFLECTIONS FROM THE
DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION
INITIATIVE PRESIDENTS

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Thank you to DEI Presidents for taking the time to share their insights.



DEVELOPMENTAL
EDUCATION
INITIATIVE
Accelerating Achievement

About the Developmental Education Initiative

The Developmental Education initiative is a groundbreaking effort funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation to scale-up developmental (remedial) education innovations within the Achieving the Dream national reform network. Fifteen community colleges and six states are expanding innovations and promoting state policy reforms to make developmental education more effective, more efficient—or unnecessary altogether—and to reduce students’ financial burden and increase the likelihood they’ll earn a credential.



About MDC

MDC, the managing partner of DEI, is a Durham, N.C.-based nonprofit established in 1967 to help the South build a racially integrated, high-performing workforce in a time of transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy. MDC manages more than a dozen programs across the U.S. that connect education, employment, and asset-building to help people “learn, earn, and save” their way to a place in the middle class. MDC’s strategies, aimed at reducing the barriers that separate people from opportunity, include: using data to define gaps and mobilize leaders to create a will for change; demonstrating sustainable solutions and developing them into effective models; and then incubating them so they can be replicated at scale for maximum impact.

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Foreword

By David L. Dodson
President, MDC

This is a pivotal time for developmental education. As community colleges do even more educating of the nation's next generation of workers (and with dwindling resources), there is a stark realization that too many students are not getting past the starting line, trapped and discouraged in remedial classes. With the economy suffering, the nation's demography changing, and the realization that 21st century jobs will require skills markedly different than those of earlier generations and economies, recognition of the importance of postsecondary learning has never been higher. Developmental education can be a stepping stone to the right credential, but we must ensure that it's not a roadblock. —————▶

Community colleges across the country have been hard at work to improve outcomes for underprepared students. In 2009, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation recognized the problem and asked MDC, in association with Achieving the Dream, to create the Developmental Education Initiative, a ground-breaking effort to scale-up innovations in developmental education. For three years, 15 institutions and six states worked with key MDC and Achieving the Dream partners to improve practices and policies resulting in more—and ultimately most—students successfully completing remedial classes or bypassing them altogether.

What We Know is a reflection from the front lines of what college presidents and program leaders learned about what it takes to revamp and reform developmental education. It is a follow-up to MDC's *More to Most: Scaling Up Effective Community College Practices*, a guidebook to help colleges go through the process of implementing practices with the greatest likelihood of sustainable success.

In the first part of this two-part volume, DEI college presidents write honestly about the hard work it takes to lay the groundwork for programmatic reform. They discuss altering cultures, adjusting the campus environment, and getting faculty, staff, and students on board. They are doing it all amid changes in the economy, the funding environment, and even in college leadership—recognizing (sometimes through their own classroom experiences) the tremendous challenge that developmental education reform represents.

The second part features a synthesis of the successful pathways for underprepared students that faculty and program directors devised as they scaled-up promising programs and policies. With examples from all 15 DEI colleges, it captures the importance of early intervention, support services, improved instruction, alignment with degree programs, and includes a guide to help colleges design the path that's right for them.

These reflections make it clear that change doesn't happen overnight. When there are so many students and practices involved, it takes time for cultures and classrooms to change. But presidents and everyone on campus can't be afraid to take the risk, to find out what works and what doesn't, what's feasible and what isn't, because that's an essential part of progress.

This book is designed to help college leaders across the country learn from the experiences of 15 brave and committed colleges, to warn them of the pitfalls and help them understand what works, as we all focus on making a postsecondary credential a reality for not just more, but all of our students. Because their lives, and the nation's future, depend on it.

Houston Community College District

Facilitating District-wide Developmental Education Improvements

By Mary S. Spangler
Chancellor, Houston Community College District



My biggest “Aha!” moment regarding developmental education preceded the Developmental Education Initiative (DEI) by several years. It happened during my teaching-learning career, when I worked with developmental writing students. It became clear to me then that students did not need to listen to me talk to them from behind a lectern about how to write a sentence. They needed to do the writing and learn by rewriting their work. In fact, when my co-author and I designed materials that students could easily understand and learn from, they could almost teach themselves how to write. I added to their classroom experience the belief that they could write and could enjoy expressing themselves in writing.

Instead of lecturing, I became a writing coach and guide. In this role I encouraged students to move at their own pace. Suddenly, I was individualizing their instruction and helping students master the learning so they could move along the continuum. Many students did not actually have to spend 18 weeks in a classroom. They could move more quickly and understand easily what they needed to do to communicate their thoughts to a reader. That experience of changing the relationship in the classroom was a powerful one for me, and it made me realize that anyone can learn to write. In fact, students who did not want to write or did not enjoy writing suddenly found themselves excelling at writing with help from me.

“The chief executive officer is in the best position to be the convener and to redirect resources that respond to challenges. However, it takes a team of committed people to transform an institution.”

Facilitating Student Success

When I arrived at Houston Community College in March 2007, I embraced the opportunity to apply the lessons I had learned long ago in a new way. The Achieving the Dream (ATD) program had been underway here for five years. It became my responsibility to continue the leadership commitment and identify ways the college community could develop deeper approaches to increasing student success in developmental education and expand access to new programs and pedagogy. I felt comfortable in the role of teacher-coach-leader as a result of spending 25 years as a professor of English teaching and developing my skills with mastery learning (in which students’ learning pace is set by how quickly they master content, rather than how much time they spend in a classroom), and

“To keep the energy flowing and the momentum going, we regularly share our good news at board meetings and involve the board with training opportunities so they are aware of the progress we are making.”

individualized instruction, and co-authoring four textbooks. As a consequence of these experiences, I decided to add the Community College Survey of Student Engagement to our data sources. I also beefed up the Office of Institutional Research by hiring additional staff and asking them to focus on presenting data in formats that told HCC’s stories in accessible, approachable formats.

Increasing Awareness

Other leadership opportunities were presented as we created the college’s strategic plan, *Relevance and Opportunity, a Strategic Plan Essential to Our Future: 2008–2011*. We tied our ATD efforts to the budget and then moved further in 2009 to take advantage of our DEI grant by making it a requirement that all new and transferring students with fewer than 12 semester hours take a student success course. We offer versions of the course for undeclared majors and students interested in engineering, health care, teaching, and the workforce.

The results have been encouraging:

- Fall-to-spring persistence of 2009 cohorts was better than 2006 cohorts’ – even as enrollment grew – for all ethnic groups except Asian students, whose 78% persistence rate was the same
- African American students made the greatest gains with a persistence rate increase from 69% to 75%

We continued those efforts in *Creating Opportunities for Our Shared Future: Strategic Plan 2012–2015*. I was also able to coordinate and support a number of our competitive innovation projects and provide them with funding under the Chancellor’s Innovation Fund Awards, directing the college’s attention to the importance of the work and outcomes we were accomplishing as a community. We also increased awareness of the shortcomings in developmental education by recognizing faculty champions. Acknowledging the faculty champions who lead new strategies and support new practices that improve outcomes for our students has been an effective way to encourage other faculty to join the effort. In some instances this has meant that critical mass and positive results have

been achieved more quickly. We also have emphasized student success themes at faculty conferences and on our Web site. It is fair to say that the process worked slowly, but eventually everyone began to realize that the institution had a problem and a responsibility. It also became clear that as a college we could provide some meaningful solutions through the leadership of faculty who championed the program.

Addressing Challenges

Because of my personal commitment to developmental writing and my interest in finding solutions and securing the buy-in of faculty, administrators, and staff to help students, I was readily available to support new approaches and lend my assistance where needed and where it would work best.

The creation of the vice chancellor for student success position and addition of this person to the Chancellor's Strategic Team is an example of organizational changes made to sustain innovations. The creation of a Budget Task Force that has evolved into a College Transformation Advisory Council has resulted in ways to make the college more effective and efficient. It also has enabled the college to review restructuring, and manage resources that could be useful in increasing developmental education success.

Keeping the Momentum Going

The Chancellor's Innovation Fund Award was created to encourage faculty, staff, and administrators across the institution to work collaboratively to design new strategies that increase developmental education success. Opportunities to showcase our new strategies at conferences also seems to energize innovative work throughout the college.

To keep the momentum going, we regularly share our good news at board meetings and involve the board with training opportunities so they are aware of the progress we are making. Informing and engaging the trustees enables them to spread the information about how we push significant experiences out into the community, highlight our successes, and learn from the reforms that we introduce and implement.

The chief executive officer is in the best position to be the convener and to redirect resources that respond to challenges. However, it takes a team of committed people to transform an institution.

Mary S. Spangler, Ed.D, has been chancellor of the Houston Community College District since 2007.

Sinclair Community College

Observations from the Practice of Change

By Steven Lee Johnson
President and CEO, Sinclair Community College
and

Kathleen C. Cleary
Associate Provost and DEI Project Director, Sinclair Community College



We know from the wisdom of the ages that necessity is the mother of invention. In the practice of managing change, the strong and continuing focus on a particular necessity is the all-encompassing key to initiating and sustaining an effective change agenda.

In the wild, the practice of change does not follow an orderly, straight-line process. Change tends to be messy and wobbly. The following elements are involved.

1. Necessity: The necessity must be understood, analyzed, diagrammed, modeled, spread-sheeted, and bullet-pointed. The necessity must thus be made clear, profound, important, and relevant. A strong case built on a clear and compelling necessity is required to sustain the entire process of any long and difficult change. The illustration of the necessity is not only an early stage activity. It must be done early, and then repeated, repeated, and repeated (obsessively).

For Sinclair Community College, the assessment and reassessment of developmental education courses is a leading example. The necessity for change became clear as we collectively analyzed data surrounding student success in developmental education. Through Achieving the Dream (ATD) and the Developmental Education Initiative (DEI), we tracked data on student success in English, reading and math, disaggregated by race and income status.

2. Champions: There must be people of appropriate power and influence who strongly adopt the importance of the necessity. They must have a passion for the necessity, and use their power throughout the process of change (and the portfolio of power comes in many and varied forms such as resources, persuasion, votes, ability to communicate, and more). A strong necessity champion(s) is required to sustain the entire process of any long and difficult change.

Champions for DEI were found throughout the campus, from the college's senior leaders to frontline staff. Getting faculty buy-in was important, but support for the work was also found throughout advising, student services, and instruction.

3. Stakeholders: A substantial necessity requiring substantial change is always connected to important individuals and groups. These stakeholders must be known and understood from their hopes and fears, to their view of how a given change design and implementation will impact them. The stakeholders' power needs to be known and

“A given change initiative simply must have ample resources, and such resources must be applied effectively at all stages and phases.”

understood (resources, votes, policy authority, ability to persuade, and more). The stakeholder leaders, and the effective methods of communicating to and from each stakeholder group (which varies by group) must be discerned. Leaders from within the stakeholders should be sought to assist with the change process design (as some, but not all stakeholder leaders, will do). Open channels of communication from “ambassadors” of the champions should be continuously attempted for those stakeholder group leaders who choose not to participate in supporting given change. Knowing stakeholders is an involved and iterative process that must be maintained throughout the change design and implementation process.

For DEI, the project director activated stakeholders including faculty, advisors, and student support personnel to embrace the necessary change and begin to explore alternatives to the traditional way of offering developmental education.

4. Change Strategy Design and Implementation: Strategy formation and implementation is very involved and can take on an all-consuming life of its own. Strategy is a means to an end of realizing the opportunities of the necessity. Strategy should be the result of facts and benchmarking. Strategy needs champions, too. The related stakeholders need to be managed so that those who can help with strategy do so, and those who can obstruct strategy don’t do so much—unless the obstructing stakeholders are found to be in the right. In that case, a better strategy needs to be designed.

Change strategies for DEI included reducing the need for developmental education by working with high school partners and then accelerating progress through developmental education once students arrived at Sinclair. We leveraged partnerships with our local high schools to help remediate students while they were still in high school, most notably in our academic resource centers that are located in the high schools. The faculty developed accelerated models in English, math, and reading in many ways including boot camps for a quick refresher of content; co-requisite developmental and college-level courses; and modularized math courses.

5. Resources: A given change initiative simply must have ample resources, and such resources must be applied effectively at all stages and phases. Gaining “realistic” projections and uses of resources is an involved process that requires periodic and thoughtful attention.

DEI provided us with financial resources to explore alternative ways of delivering developmental education. Sinclair had been pursuing excellence in developmental education for many years, but our faculty and staff were still not satisfied with the results. Our DEI effort was bolstered by our commitment to the long haul and our acceptance of bumps along the road as part of our process for learning what works.

We now have a sustainable model for all three of our on-campus initiatives and are committed to continuing all three beyond the grant period.

6. Iterations: The best laid plans are made better through constant, recursive remodeling and adjustments as time and experience unfold. A necessity can be illustrated and designed up-front to be stable and persistent, but strategy design and implementation, resource management, and relationships with and among stakeholders will—in an effective change process—be continuously adjusted. Steps backward, sideways, and pauses are often needed before again moving forward. Frequent adjustment is typically not the maladaptive result of poor planning; it is the result of realistically responding to learning the previously unknown, and to the complications of unfolding realities.

Early on, we tried to scale too quickly in the math modules project. After getting early, promising results, we tried to triple our capacity in one quarter. This led to students not being adequately informed about the new modality and adjunct faculty who were not as well prepared as we thought they were to teach in this new modality. We learned from this the importance of prudent, evidence-based scaling and have now found increased success for a larger number of students.

7. Emotions versus Facts: Effective change design and processing needs inputs and actions from those with high emotional intelligence as much as it needs inputs from data analytics. This is not an either-or situation, however. Emotional and relationship savvy alone will not win the day, nor will facts and data. Both are needed in a dynamic balance and rebalancing.

Initially, our developmental education faculty were resistant to trying the math modules approach because they had tried a similar initiative in the past that was not successful. The project director acknowledged their concerns and compromised with the faculty by asking them to develop the course materials and then hiring an annually contracted faculty member on a one-year position to teach the course. The success data from this first year were used to recruit full-time, tenured faculty in subsequent years and there are now about 10 to 15 faculty members who teach in this modality, including full-time and part-time instructors.

“Effective change design and processing needs inputs and actions from those with high emotional intelligence as much as it needs inputs from data analytics.”

8. Obstacles and Detours: A necessity with unrealized opportunities and persistent concerns is only a failure if the vision of the necessity is lost and forgotten, and abandoned by champions. Otherwise the inevitable slowdowns, failures of discrete strategies, expended budgets, and other “failures” are actually learning milestones on the path to success.

When the math modules program initially scaled too quickly, and the results indicated a lack of infrastructure (advising, faculty development, etc.) to support the scaling, the project director acknowledged publicly these lessons learned and brought in the director of advising and department chair to identify solutions for moving forward. Following that “failure,” we were intentional about having advising and the Center for Teaching and Learning at the table at the design phase of future change initiatives.

Steven Lee Johnson, Ph.D., has been president of Sinclair Community College since 2003. Kathleen C. Cleary, Ph.D., became an administrator at Sinclair Community College in 2009, and began serving on the faculty in 2003.

Norwalk Community College

A Framework for Ensuring Student Achievement

By David L. Levinson
President, Norwalk Community College



Shortly after I began my presidency at Norwalk Community College (NCC) on August 2, 2004, I was presented with a copy of the college's decennial self-study that was about to be sent to the New England Association of Schools and Colleges in preparation for a fall site visit. To my dismay, the document contained few empirical measures and lacked critical reflection. While there was not the time nor institutional capacity to commandeer an intensive institutional research effort, I reconvened a few members of the task force and asked them to reflect on what they had written. Fortunately, this not only resulted in an improved document, but conveyed a message that as president I wanted candid assessment and for all to focus continuously on best practices and excellence.

What I encountered during my first weeks as a college president has turned out to be a metaphor for the process of institutional change. Often engaged in what can truly be termed "heroic efforts," administrators, faculty, and staff are tenacious when it comes to defining their existing practices. In a community college setting where resources are often inadequate, student preparation wanting, and teaching loads high, there is often not the time or space to engage in critical self-reflection. It then becomes the responsibility of the president to set an organizational tone that nurtures—and at times demands—reflection so that the enhancement of student success becomes priority #1. And fortunately we received external funding that gave us the ability to provide faculty and staff with a respite from heavy workload demands.

"It then becomes the responsibility of the president to set an organizational tone that nurtures—and at times demands—reflection so that the enhancement of student success becomes priority #1."

Participation in Achieving the Dream (ATD) was a critical catalyst for our ability to provide faculty and staff with the tools needed to engage in self-assessment. For NCC this involved creating a Division of Institutional Effectiveness. When I learned that more than 80% of our students coming from our two largest feeder districts, the Norwalk and Stamford public schools, place into developmental courses, I was shocked! It quickly became apparent that I had to reach out to these communities and create effective linkages so that students coming to NCC would be college ready.

One of our first “data-gathering” events was a “community conversation” comprised of local stakeholders. With the assistance of Public Agenda, a public engagement organization, we brought more than 120 members of our external community to campus on a frigid Saturday morning to brainstorm about what the college, in partnership with the community, could do to address this challenge. An important outgrowth of this work was the formation of Norwalk ACTS (Achievement, Cooperation, Teams, Success) for Children. The mayor of Norwalk, school superintendent, president of the teachers’ union, head of the Norwalk Education Foundation, head of the NAACP, executive director of the Norwalk Children’s Foundation, and I, as founding core members, set the ambitious goal of rallying all human and social service agencies in the city—along with local philanthropic interests—to rid Norwalk of its achievement gap. This effort centers on three strategic goals: ensuring that all children have a quality pre-school experience, read at grade level by third grade, and graduate from high school college and/or career ready. Our work is informed by the Collective Impact model and we recently joined the Strive Network. While there have been some bumps in the road since this network was formed in 2005, we’ve made significant progress in many areas. I am especially proud that NCC was cited by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as a community-engaged institution in 2010.

It has been challenging to strike a balance between responding to a litany of external community needs while minding things “back home” at the college. For me, as president, our Development Education Initiative (DEI) has provided a welcome framework for ensuring student achievement. Although the focus of this initiative has been on “developmental” students, many of the practices that we have employed—such as ePortfolios, learning communities, and out-of-class recitations for students in mathematics—are important tools for all students.

The most poignant “Aha!” moment in my DEI work occurred when I taught a student success course in a learning community that combined pre-college and college-level work. This was my first time teaching students who had developmental needs—all of them placed in our EN 084 Basic Composition course, which was the qualifier for this learning community—and I gained an appreciation of the challenges and struggles that our students face. This experience taught me

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the importance of contextualized learning, because when I placed a problem or issue within the life experience of the students, they responded beautifully. I recall a discussion about the importance of social groups and peer influence, where we spoke about gangs – something many of the students experienced either first- or second-hand – as an example of these concepts in real life. I was later struck by the solidarity and strong community formation that occurred in this learning community: each of the students looked out for one-another; would contact peers if they weren’t showing up to class; and overall, demonstrated the power of a social network. I came away with an appreciation of students’ positive application of the teamwork skills that they had seen to negative effect in gangs.

Maintaining the resources to sustain our work in the future will be a challenge. Recently the Connecticut State Legislature passed a public act that requires us to restructure developmental education significantly by fall 2014. The goal is to eliminate students becoming mired in developmental course sequences where they exhaust their Pell grants on non-academic credit courses. Given that I have taken on a new supplemental role to my presidency – vice president for community colleges under our relatively new Connecticut Board of Regents – I will be at the center of this effort, balancing both “external” and “internal” demands.

David L. Levinson, Ph.D., has been president of Norwalk Community College since 2004.

Patrick Henry Community College

Plate Spinning and Other Requirements to Sustain Innovation

By Angeline Godwin
President, Patrick Henry Community College



“The lesson is quite simple. If the work is to be sustained, replacements cannot have steep learning curves.”

The Developmental Education Initiative (DEI) at Patrick Henry Community College (PHCC) has been marked by incredible challenges coupled with exciting and innovative ways to enhance student achievement. Having assumed the presidency in July 2012, one of the greatest challenges for me with respect to DEI was walking in on the “tail end” of a major initiative. What I witnessed was the DEI project director (who is also a campus dean) behaving like the proverbial plate spinner, working on one project just long enough to keep it from collapsing and then quickly dashing over to whatever project/plate is teetering and giving it a good spin. Because of an extreme amount of high-level administrative turnover in the last 12 months (including his own position), he has done a huge amount of plate spinning in the last year, and successfully prevented anything from collapsing.

In fact, it is really quite amazing that the initiative has been sustained successfully during this last year considering that the president, the academic vice president who is the chief academic officer, the college foundation’s vice president, and the dean of Developmental Education, who also serves as the DEI project manager, have all “turned over” in the last 12 months. Certainly, the biggest reason for this sustained success lies in the fact that ideal candidates were chosen for both the academic vice president and the dean/DEI project manager, the two positions directly tied to DEI. The former worked with the Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin and was deeply embedded in the student success movement. Meanwhile, the new dean/DEI project manager (the “plate spinner”) was an internal candidate who had been fully involved with PHCC’s Achieving the Dream (ATD) and DEI work since their inceptions. Consequently, both administrators have been able to lead the college through the DEI efforts in the middle of huge transitions. The lesson is quite simple. If the work is to be sustained, replacements cannot have steep learning curves.

Cooperative Learning Redefines College

While each strategy associated with DEI has proven to be successful, it is the cooperative learning initiative that has helped to redefine this institution. In fact, Patrick Henry’s national reputation as a leader in cooperative learning was one of the major features that initially attracted me to the college. I also learned very quickly that the faculty, staff, board, and other stakeholders were very keen

on continuing this work well beyond the life of the grant as I was peppered with questions about the pedagogy during my on-campus interviews. I have since found that cooperative learning is not just an initiative or a grant program at PHCC; in many ways, it has become the heart and soul of the college.

Scaling of cooperative learning really began in earnest through the ATD process, so increased scaling of this important pedagogy was a natural progression for the institution. Since the cooperative learning movement was early on a faculty-driven initiative, it became quite natural for the philosophy to continue to gain momentum through the DEI efforts.

No one really looked at this work as “the next big fad that will soon be replaced with another.” The culture of the classroom was already changing at PHCC because this work has been “bottom up” from the beginning. Once DEI came into play, momentum was already well-established, so the administrators just got out of the way and let it continue to build, providing support as necessary. Now, as we take inventory of all the changes that have been made to the faculty job description, the requirement for faculty training within one year of hire, the inclusion of cooperative learning as part of the faculty evaluation process, the yearly training opportunities provided to all full-time and adjunct faculty, and an annual Data Summit, we can safely say that each one of these was faculty driven! Because of our success with cooperative learning, several other institutions have received professional development through our Southern Center for Active Learning Excellence (SCALE). Without exception, those which have been the most successful are the ones that have taken our “bottom up” advice.

“Since the cooperative learning movement was early-on a faculty-driven initiative, it became quite natural for the philosophy to continue to gain momentum through the DEI efforts... so the administrators just got out of the way and let it continue to build, providing support as necessary.”

Reallocation Sustains Other Innovations

While cooperative learning has been the major ATD/DEI focus at PHCC, two other initiatives have been quite successful, and as a result have become institutionalized with state dollars. Intensive—some might say intrusive—

advising for developmental students and the sustainability of a math lab were both important by-products of PHCC's DEI work. While the math lab had been in existence for years, it had never been staffed by a full-time manager until the DEI grant. Because of the success of both of these projects, the dean for Developmental Education/DEI director approached my predecessor and the vice presidents in the weeks before my arrival with a request for institutional funding of the advisor and math lab manager positions. He wisely came armed with two very important things: the student success data associated with both initiatives and a willingness to reallocate funding in order to receive money for the two positions he wisely characterized as "absolutely essential for ongoing student success." Since he had the data and had already found the dollars, it was easy to approve.

Even though I came to PHCC toward the end of the DEI grant period, it has been quite rewarding to see the fruits of these efforts playing out in front of my eyes. I see my job now as the one who champions the cause and sustains the work. Success breeds success, so we are anticipating continued improvements because of the progress we made with DEI.

Angeline Godwin, Ph.D. and J.D., became president of Patrick Henry Community College in 2012.

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Eastern Gateway Community College

Moving the Success Needle Upward at Eastern Gateway

By Laura M. Meeks
President, Eastern Gateway Community College



Many projects, grants, and activities provide catalysts for change in higher education, but rarely have I seen the long-term, move-the-needle effects that our college and others have accomplished through Achieving the Dream (ATD) and the Developmental Education Initiative (DEI). Being involved in ATD and advancing to Leader College status has provided Eastern Gateway with a wonderful opportunity to participate in DEI. The Dream crusade and DEI have both given Eastern Gateway Community College the tools and guidance to look at challenges using data, helping us to remove assumptions and guesses from our discussions and other decision-making processes.

Utilizing Scorecard System and Other Data

From my perspective, the scorecard system we created with the assistance of our ATD coaches crystallized college-wide attention on developmental education, gateway courses, academic advising, and our first-year experience course. The scorecard system was so effective we expanded its use for college-wide strategic planning and development of our board of trustees' goals as well as the president's annual evaluation.

Deciding whether orientation should be mandatory for all new students was an "Aha!" moment as I remember my opinion shifting based on student outcome data. National data pointed to the success of first-generation students completing this type of course, and Eastern Gateway began testing an expansion of orientation at the start of our ATD work. But it was not until data from our first efforts proved the effectiveness of Eastern Gateway's classes that I became a firm believer in mandatory orientation.

Instigating Wholesale Change

While our ATD efforts nudged the success needle for Eastern Gateway students in developmental courses, DEI allowed for wholesale change that has helped our students make greater progress. For the incoming students, 75% test into one or more developmental math courses. Also, 31% of new students test into developmental English courses. Obviously, these high developmental education placement rates can be the first roadblocks to college success. In the past, attendance in developmental math and some English courses was poor and pass rates fell below the C- grade range.

Following a year of redesigning all developmental math courses and another year redesigning our English and reading courses, Eastern Gateway launched its new math and English courses in fall 2010 and 2011, respectively. Both faculty and staff are optimistic that the redesigns and the related reduction of lectures and increased use of learning technologies and labs will allow for more individualized

“As president of the college, I found it imperative that everyone—all full- and part-time faculty, the executive vice president for academic affairs, the director of developmental education, and all the trustees — be on board with the changes. This inclusiveness led to a transformation in culture and pedagogy.”

learning that is self-paced. The math redesign, for instance, uses MyMathLab modules, a 24-hour help line, and more hours of assistance with instructors at the Student Success Center.

In 2012 faculty were already seeing promising results from students in the newly designed courses compared to the old, lecture-based classes. Students are more engaged and attendance is up. Students are doing more math themselves rather than just watching the faculty do the math on the board. These changes hold the promise of students earning better grades, completing more than one developmental education course within the semester, and moving more seamlessly on to college-level course work.

To support the curriculum changes, professional development sessions for involved faculty, full- and part-time, are offered regularly. Initially, all math and English faculty were educated in the respective software programs. In addition to these on-campus sessions, faculty attended national conferences to gain more knowledge, experience, and insight into developmental education. Faculty Inquiry Groups facilitate understanding of the redesigned courses and evaluation of results. The revamped courses, along with professional development and Faculty Inquiry Group initiatives, have the potential for broad and long-term positive results.

DEI also was the impetus for policy changes. The college now requires mandatory placement of students who test into developmental courses during their first semester. The college added language to the college catalog and we are

programming our student information system to support advising and registration compliance. These changes have affected all our students.

Scaling Innovations

As president of the college, I found it imperative that everyone—all full- and part-time faculty, the executive vice president for academic affairs, the director of developmental education, and all the trustees—be on board with the changes. This inclusiveness led to a transformation in culture and pedagogy. Asking individuals to change after 40 years was not an easy task. However, with leadership, the intelligent use of data, and guidance from outstanding consultants, everyone saw the value and benefits for our students. The college adopted the student success agenda wholeheartedly.

The college first implemented the new design of its developmental math and English program on the main campus. Currently, we are expanding this new delivery model to other college sites. With the success experienced on the main campus, not much persuasion was needed. To accomplish the expansion, the college is installing more computers in the classrooms and providing the necessary professional development for faculty so that by spring 2013, all six sites will be using computer-aided instruction for developmental math and English.

Thanks to funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, guidance from our consultants, the involvement of our faculty and staff, Eastern Gateway redesigned its developmental math and English programs, and results show the success needle moving upward.

Laura M. Meeks, Ph.D., has been president of Eastern Gateway Community College since it was created as an expansion of Jefferson Community College in 2009. Meeks became president of Jefferson Community College in 1999.

“DEI allowed for wholesale change that has helped our students make greater progress.”

Valencia College

Early Challenges Lead to Enhanced Partnership Collaboration

By Sanford C. Shugart
President, Valencia College



When Valencia College was selected as a first round college in the Developmental Education Initiative (DEI) it was a signal event, but not the beginning of our journey in this work by any means. We had been in deep campus conversations toward improving student learning and success since the mid-1990s, and implementing specific strategies, especially in student affairs and faculty development, with a focus on what we then called “underprepared students.” In 2000, the college was selected as a Vanguard Learning College by the League for Innovation, focusing our efforts to “put learning first,” challenge the “deep architecture of the college,” and discipline our innovations with rigorous data analysis. A few years later, the college was a first-round Achieving the Dream college, funded and sponsored generously by the Lumina Foundation. This work helped us begin to scale-up instructional innovations across the institution. So by the time we began to work with DEI, the college had a decade of experience in large-scale initiatives aimed at improving student learning, helping them progress through the college, and completion. This was our work, firmly established in the culture of the college, not really a new initiative, but with a new partner, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. My challenge as a leader, then, was not to motivate the college to action on an emerging issue, but to help the college discern where this partnership could best strengthen and accelerate our efforts.

Addressing the Challenges of Novelty

Frankly, being in the first round had its advantages and disadvantages. As the deadline for the initial proposal neared, we were collaborating deeply in the college with scores of faculty and staff to determine our next steps in the journey. The new initiative, however, was still taking shape at the national level and the expectations were, shall we say, a bit of a moving target. When the final pre-submission conference was held, it was clear that the expectations no longer aligned with the work we had deeply vetted in the college. Specifically, the DEI leaders began to articulate a change agenda with an aggressive timeline, seeking to scale solutions that would show dramatic results in a mere three years.

We re-wrote our proposal with the small team from Valencia at the conference to focus on accelerating the scaling of solutions we already were piloting at an advanced level: Supplemental Instruction, Learning in Communities, Bridges to Success (a high-context induction program for at-risk new students), student success courses, and a focus on inculcating student success strategies both in a long-taught course and across other first-year courses.

This “pivot” in our strategies created the potential for serious challenges back home. Many had contributed to the now-aborted proposal. Was this work to be forgotten? Was our deep culture of collaboration dispensable in the face of a powerful and generous partner? Could we scale the initiatives we proposed and

“Most colleges, most organizations, are content to do ‘best practices,’ that is, knock off someone else’s technique because it seems to work for them. But technique practiced without an underlying theory is brittle, inauthentic, and difficult to mold as the work progresses. Further, a technical approach fosters a spirit of advocacy for one’s favorite solution rather than an essential spirit of inquiry around which we can collaborate to get the best results and build coherent solutions.”

invest the resources required without the ownership of the many who had been in on the design process?

There were potential problems on the other side of the partnership, as well. Three years to show dramatic change in results that had been stable for more than three decades was a lot to ask. Further, the DEI leadership’s theory of change was all about acceleration—how to get students out of developmental courses and into the college level work they really wanted to do as quickly as possible. Thus, the strategies being urgently recommended were about compression of time, more focused remediation on a discreet set of skills needed in next courses, embedded remediation, and the like. Our approach to acceleration was a little different, believing that what delayed most students wasn’t the length of the course or volume of learning outcomes to be mastered, but the habit of course failure and withdrawal that leads to course repetition, with decreasing probabilities of success.

Directing Everyone to Common Ground

I found myself, as the president, standing in the middle of the partnership, working to get my institution and the DEI leadership—rapidly becoming an institution of its own—to partner productively, see our differences as strengths worthy of further inquiry, and find common ground around which to invest in our shared work. What made Valencia a worthy partner for DEI was the strong ideas and commitments forged together over more than a decade. What made DEI a worthy partner was much more than serious funding and an undeniable brand; our partners had ideas, too, theories about what would work for students in developmental education, many of them emerging as the work progressed and gleaned from across many institutions and many expert organizations. Great partnerships are always forged between such worthy partners, and always carry the possibility of friction, conflict, disappointment, etc. My job was to assure this didn't happen, that the strengths of both parties were appreciated.

One essential tool for managing this relationship was to focus on the working theories that were the foundations of our best innovations, that is, the model around which we were designing specific solutions. Most colleges, most organizations, are content to do “best practices,” that is, knock off someone else's technique because it seems to work for them. But technique practiced without an underlying theory is brittle, inauthentic, and difficult to mold as the work progresses. Further, a technical approach fosters a spirit of advocacy for one's favorite solution rather than an essential spirit of inquiry around which we can collaborate to get the best results and build coherent solutions.

I suspect that the most important skill I gained through DEI was an enhanced capacity to collaborate with thought partners on real work, work with consequences, work that we all earnestly want to move forward with all of our resources.

Sanford C. Shugart, Ph.D., has been president of Valencia College since 2000.

Guilford Technical Community College

President Takes Up Role as Developmental Education Champion

By Randy Parker
President, Guilford Technical Community College



Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC), along with three other North Carolina community colleges, was an original participant in the Achieving the Dream (ATD) initiative beginning in 2004. That same year, I became president of Vance-Granville Community College in northeastern North Carolina, a college roughly one-third the size of GTCC. Over the next seven years, I watched with keen interest the work of these ATD colleges and admired the successes they were enjoying. GTCC's success was nationally recognized when it was awarded one of fifteen Developmental Education Initiative (DEI) grants in 2009. Then, in 2010, GTCC was named the recipient of ATD's Leah Meyer Austin Institutional Student Success Leadership Award. And in the spring of 2011, just before I was selected as GTCC's new president, North Carolina was named by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as one of four states to receive the Completion by Design grant, with GTCC as the managing partner of the North Carolina cadre.

I describe this chronology to underscore the fact that I entered GTCC's nationally recognized work with student success midstream. In fact, when I was interviewed by the college's trustees, it was crystal clear to me that demonstrated student success was the top item on their agenda. They explicitly explored my commitment to the initiatives that were under way at GTCC and to the newly announced Completion by Design grant. So, in September of 2011, I became the president of a college totally immersed in student success efforts.

It has been quite a transition. During my seven-year tenure as president of Vance-Granville, we began to travel an ATD-like path although we never formally joined the initiative. With broad input, both internally and externally, we developed a comprehensive strategic plan that focused the college more clearly on specific student success goals. We built a more sophisticated institutional research office, established an institutional data warehouse, developed some baseline student success benchmarks, and began to set some strategic goals for improvement. Only a lack of funding prevented us from applying for membership in ATD, but I had clearly experienced some of the joys and frustrations of leading this sort of institutional change.

As I entered the presidency at GTCC, I found a culture well-established in the principles of data-informed decision-making that focuses on improving student success on a number of fronts. GTCC piloted 15 ATD initiatives between 2004 and 2008. When I arrived in 2011, 11 of those pilot programs were well-established and self-sustaining within the college's ongoing operations. The college was two years into its DEI initiatives and already had been recognized by external evaluators for its early successes. I could take no credit for those successes, and I did not try. I gave credit to my predecessor, Don Cameron, and to the faculty and staff involved in those efforts.

Promoting Student Success

What I did do was what the board of trustees had asked me to do. I made sure that I was briefed early in my tenure about the ATD, DEI, and Completion by Design work. I got to know the leaders within the college who were carrying on this work. I met with individuals and groups; I talked with formal and informal leaders; I visited classes and labs. I observed closely, and I asked a lot of questions. I attended related meetings at the local, state, and national levels. And, I tried to be the strongest champion I could for what was obviously significant work.

Here are some specific ways as president that I attempt to champion this ongoing effort:

- I take every public occasion to recognize GTCC's involvement in these initiatives and why they are important to our students.
- I ensure that every meeting of our board of trustees includes a presentation or discussion about student success issues.
- Similarly, every all-personnel gathering at GTCC includes information about our student success initiatives.
- I try to support the faculty and staff providing leadership to these initiatives by making my door open to them when they need support. I also ask that they keep me informed about their progress.
- I promote their work in the community college professional associations to which I belong and seek opportunities to scale their successes to other colleges.
- Perhaps most importantly, I make sure that the work of promoting student success in its broadest sense is at the heart of our college—that it is felt by applicants visiting our campus for the first time, that it is evident in our strategic plan, that it is part of the agenda for every employee group and every campus organization—and that improved student success guides my work and my decisions.

Randy Parker, Ed.D., has been president of Guilford Technical Community College since 2011.

Housatonic Community College

Effective Education Methods Evolve from Data Analysis

By Anita Gliniecki
President, Housatonic Community College



Housatonic Community College (HCC) identified the serious gap, now making national headlines, in the college readiness of high school graduates in 2004–05. It was our first year of Achieving the Dream. Faculty and staff analyzed the data on incoming student placement scores and completion rates for developmental courses. The course completion rates were dropping along with the placement scores. The data also showed that those who completed English developmental courses succeeded at levels equal to, or higher than, those who were placed directly into college-level English courses. This was not true in math—the college found weak developmental- and college-level math completion rates.

HCC has monthly meetings of all staff and faculty. The silence was deafening when the math data were shared in 2004. The problem was blatant; the solutions unknown! HCC prides itself on our positive, supportive student environment and strong developmental program, yet the statistics were devastating. I emphasized at the community meetings that having poor results was not a problem; having poor results and doing nothing about it was a major problem. No time would be spent on finding fault. Our energy as a college was on developing, testing, and implementing improvement strategies. We conducted focus groups with students and community members, and solutions became clearer.

The students succinctly explained that the developmental math classes were taught “too fast and too slow.” Asked to explain what that meant, the students stated that they were bored to death in class when the instruction was on math principles that they knew. However, that which they did not know went too fast and they needed more time. Within the scheduled 15-week course, students had to learn all the math concepts assigned, and the instruction had to stick with the schedule. If the students were able to pass enough of the exams to earn a passing course grade, they went on to the next math class with the same gaps in their math skill and knowledge. To remedy the situation, HCC created Open Entry/Open Exit, now called self-paced math courses in which the individual student demonstrates mastery of each concept before moving to the next math principle. Some students have finished both developmental math courses and a college-level math course in one semester. Others took more than one semester per course, but began the second semester where they left off. Under DEI, the self-paced math courses were further developed and the number of sections offered expanded. Also under DEI, self-paced English was developed and added to the format. Both self-paced options are now embedded in the course schedule.

Continuing to listen to students, the college explored the statement that “I know more than what my Accuplacer score shows.” With the support of the DEI grant, the college developed an intensive three-week math review program. After completing the review, a number of students who originally tested in the lowest developmental math course were placed in college-level math, took the course, and passed. Now

HCC offers this review option to all incoming new students and has added an English component.

While working on HCC's developmental courses, it was equally apparent that the college needed to work with our local high schools to improve their graduates' college readiness. The focus groups conducted with the high school principals and counselors resulted in the development of four seminars: Orientation to College, Financial Aid, Career Planning, and College Placement Testing. Once developed, the information was presented to and adapted for each high school. The college began with four and expanded to 16 high schools during DEI and continues to work with these 16 high schools and more than 2,000 high school students each year. One high school has included all of the seminars within its curriculum so that all students receive the information. Attention to costs during development enables the college to sustain and continue this program. College faculty and staff also provide many of the workshops as part of their volunteer activities with the local community.

The college's thorough processes of gathering, analyzing, and utilizing data to determine the most effective methods to educate students is a direct result of its DEI work.

HCC has experienced rapid growth, more than doubling in size in the last 15 years. We have been fortunate that, from the onset, the college has focused on the success of its students. Regardless of size, the administrative leadership of the college has maintained that focus and has been involved in remediating the gaps that prevent too many students from achieving their goals and graduating. Administrators' concern, awareness of data, and willingness to initiate change to help students succeed has changed the priorities of faculty and support staff throughout the college, including that of the Housatonic Foundation and Institutional Development. The entire administration, faculty, and staff have worked hard, and we continue our tradition of educating and doing whatever it takes to help our students succeed.

Anita Gliniecki has been president of Housatonic Community College since 2007.

Zane State College

Matriculating Students' Tuition Provides Return on Investment That Sustains Innovations

By Paul R. Brown
President, Zane State College



Since joining Achieving the Dream (ATD) as a second round school in 2005, we at Zane State College have transformed our decision-making processes, our developmental education structure, and our intervention strategies. Our decision-making processes have been transformed from anecdotal to evidence-based. We have centralized our data collection and analysis into an Institutional Research and Planning Office. Our developmental education program has transitioned from a student support service into a fully integrated division of the academic services. Advising has changed from reactive to proactive with specific intensive interventions for at-risk students. Within five years of joining ATD, Zane State College had institutionalized its principles and processes.

During ATD, the college also participated in Foundations of Excellence and examined Survey of Entering Student Engagement data. These additional efforts provided evidence that when we are able to help students transition successfully from the first year to the second year of college enrollment, they have a significantly greater likelihood of graduating. Consequently, we focused on serving cohorts of first-year developmental mathematics students who were at high risk of dropping out as determined by institutional data and other indicators. Throughout ATD, the faculty and staff focused on implementing student support interventions such as mandatory testing, placement, orientation, and a college success course. We also eliminated late registration for developmental education coursework.

Creating Accelerated Options

When Zane State College was selected to participate in the Developmental Education Initiative (DEI), the college's focus shifted to redesigning courses in order to create accelerated options for students who test into developmental education. We did this because data show high rates of student success in courses that link developmental writing and reading with college-level coursework. Similarly, compressed math courses show higher completion rates when compared to traditional developmental math. Our experience matches these trends. For the Zane State College students who have voluntarily participated in our ADVANCE (accelerated) courses, the DEI program has helped them complete developmental courses, stay enrolled, and proceed to graduation at a faster pace. However, participation in ADVANCE courses by our targeted population has remained low despite the strong encouragement of student advisors and various marketing efforts. We have recently concluded that in order to scale these successful DEI interventions, the college will have to mandate placement of students who qualify in these courses. Our biggest "Aha!" moment occurred when we realized that our Appalachian students, just like other minority students, have their own distinct culture, and that we needed to adapt interventions to capitalize on those cultural characteristics.

“Matriculation of successful students from both MathStart and QuickStart shows net positive revenue for the college.”

To complement our DEI initiatives, Zane State College obtained other grants to offer two “free” courses: MathStart, a mandatory, 10-week course for students who test well below developmental math; and QuickStart, a voluntary, eight-week course that students who need extensive work in math, writing, and general preparation for college are encouraged to take.

The success rates in both MathStart and QuickStart are higher than comparable Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) programs. This is the key to their financial sustainability. Matriculation of successful students from both courses shows net positive revenue for the college. Based on enrollment of approximately 100 students in MathStart and a 74% completion rate, the college netted \$202,336 in tuition in subsequent courses for the 2010-2011 academic year. Similarly, of the 75 QuickStart students, 51% were successful, resulting in a net tuition revenue of \$32,799. Zane State College plans to continue to expand MathStart and QuickStart based on the positive return on investment (ROI) of the successful students in these courses.

As I look back on our student success initiatives, I think my major contribution as president was to get involved at a grassroots level. I participate on the working committees and core team. I also recruited a trustee to serve on the data-driven decision making (D3M) Team and to attend the annual ATD conferences. I believe that this “top-down engagement” significantly influenced greater college-wide participation.

Acting in a more traditional role at the top of the organizational hierarchy, I addressed the major challenge that the administrators, faculty, and staff faced as we integrated the numerous initiatives that the college was pursuing simultaneously. At the first ATD Strategy Institute, I challenged our core team to develop a multi-dimensional model that shows how all the college initiatives contribute to student success outcomes. The model they developed continues to provide an important visual that shows how our various efforts fit together. We have used this model extensively to illustrate how data related to student success can be mined from several perspectives and used to prescribe interventions.

Paul R. Brown, Ed.D., has been president of Zane State College since 2004.

North Central State College

Leadership Propels Innovations

By Donald L. Plotts
President, North Central State College



As the college president, I found it essential for our student success initiatives to have very visible support from myself and the board of trustees. We demonstrated that key college leaders were engaged by our active participation on the core team for Achieving the Dream (ATD). We started our ATD efforts by reviewing our institutional research capacity and then working to strengthen it. We demonstrated the important link between the big picture concepts by clearly connecting ATD activities and our Academic Quality Improvement Program accreditation process. We did this by bringing all initiatives to a Planning Advisory Council, which consolidated and eventually institutionalized important initiatives. Then, at our earliest engagement in the Developmental Education Initiative (DEI), we involved divisional deans and department chairs who were responsible for planning and assessing developmental education.

Raising institutional awareness of the need to focus on developmental education was a bit challenging, especially in the early stages. Over time, through sending faculty to national conferences on student success (such as ATD's annual strategy institute now known as D.R.E.A.M.), we were able to ignite interest in the national conversations and development of strategies to improve student success and completion.

Faculty interest in what faculty at other colleges are doing, trying, and talking about led to professional development in cooperative learning from the faculty at Patrick Henry Community College, an ATD and DEI college. The Patrick Henry experience was invaluable as it then led to a campus retreat entitled "Courageous Conversations." Here, key faculty, academic leaders, and staff examined developmental education data that enabled the faculty to have thoughtful discussions about what might be causing the poor outcomes we were seeing. A visual exercise demonstrated the dismal percentage of students who started in developmental education and went on to complete a certificate or degree. Focusing

“Courageous conversations’ helped the faculty and other participants realize that in the end, it is very important to focus beyond developmental education and include concentration on pedagogical changes that will create more substantial and significant changes.”

on the data during the retreat helped the faculty and other participants realize that in the end, it is very important to focus beyond developmental education and include concentration on pedagogical changes that will create more substantial and significant changes.

Outcomes of Policy Changes

During this time, our board of trustees used community input and DEI data to reevaluate its ENDS policies. Our ENDS policies use a scorecard of approximately 25 performance indicators to gauge the college's effectiveness; they reflect the combined effort of multiple strategic initiatives. During their reevaluation the trustees discovered that they needed to shift the directives within the ENDS policies toward student success and completion rather than merely student access. By making this adjustment, the trustees created an atmosphere for the college to develop a strategic plan that focuses on student success and completion. Additional student success measures now link back to DEI. Overall these changes served as a "call to action" for many faculty and other important members of the college community. They also remind faculty that they all teach developmental students, even if they do not teach developmental courses.

With our new strategic focus on student success, developmental education faculty played a key role in helping unprepared and underprepared students "ramp up" to meet the rigors of college-level courses. To increase the level of success in this area we have added a Solutions program, expanded our Tutoring Center, and embedded tutors as supplemental instruction facilitators in certain courses. We are particularly proud of the Solutions program, which was developed in partnership with local Adult Basic Literacy Education providers. The Solutions program offers free individualized, self-paced instruction to adults who when initially tested place at the lowest levels of developmental education. Of the students who have retested after completing the program, 56% have improved a least one developmental level.

"These changes served as a 'call to action' for many faculty and other important members of the college community. They also remind faculty that they all teach developmental students, even if they do not teach developmental courses."

A number of operating policies were revised along with the ENDS policies and programmatic changes. Our academic assessment and placement policy was reviewed and rewritten. Student preparation for assessment testing became a requirement. We have found that by requiring assessment preparation, more students place in college-level courses with this minimal additional support. We also have moved to an on-time registration policy to eliminate missing classes through late registrations. These and other policy changes serve as reminders to students, faculty, and staff that completion is just as important as access.

“DEI and ATD have transformed North Central State College.”

Benefits of Improved Communications

Better communication with our high school partners in preparing students has led to more recent high school graduates succeeding when they get to the postsecondary level. Our work with our high school partners on aligning mathematics expectations and high school preparation activities has been particularly productive. Student focus groups have been instrumental in helping to plan, guide, and assess our work to ease the transition from high school to college.

As we continue our efforts to raise institutional awareness and understanding of the importance of DEI, we have provided professional development and budget support wherever possible for faculty and academic leaders who support the changes and work to keep the momentum going.

Transformations Among Stakeholders

DEI and ATD have transformed North Central State College. Their seemingly perfect alignment with the board’s self-discovered focus on student success has made a profound impression on trustees. It has stoked their enthusiasm by confirming the clear and unambiguous direction and purpose they have set for the college.

Having an active role in both the DEI and ATD initiatives—attending DEI Presidents’ conferences and attending strategy institutes as a member of the college’s core team—has been instrumental in helping me fully understand the value of the institutional research function and to use it as an important tool in the strategic planning process.

The lessons that the faculty, staff, trustees, and I have learned from our collective exposure, experience, and ongoing conversations about DEI and ATD also have contributed to a transformation in the way we all look at the education system in the state of Ohio. As a Leader College, we have an important role to play, as we share freely what we have learned. The Student Success Center, which the state of Ohio has created through the Ohio Association of Community Colleges, makes it easy for Ohio colleges to share information and teach others what we have learned. We at North Central State College see this as integral to our ongoing work to improve developmental education and overall student success.

Donald L. Plotts has been president of North Central State College since 2008.

“The Student Success Center makes it easy for Ohio colleges to share information and teach others what we have learned during the Developmental Education Initiative.”

South Texas College

High Expectations and Effective Communication Critical to Student Success Initiatives

By Shirley A. Reed
President, South Texas College



As president of South Texas College (STC), I am committed and passionate about identifying solutions to improve the success of our developmental education students.

During the Developmental Education Initiative (DEI) we learned that, in order for our developmental education programs to succeed, it is crucial to set high expectations for student success and to communicate those expectations. Other critical steps to build student success include

- Examining data critically and honestly
- Getting buy-in through committee formation with balanced and cross-functional representation
- Updating the president, the campus community, and other stakeholders on implementation of the grant and progress on student outcomes
- Encouraging and praising faculty and staff who work diligently to create gains.

Thanks to our Achieving the Dream experience, reviewing data has become an indispensable component of all discussions regarding student success. Before considering new strategies for the DEI grant, I requested a review of all prior interventions over the last five years in order to leverage what we had learned and to avoid repeating unsuccessful efforts. STC has had a deep commitment to developmental education students and has implemented numerous efforts to improve college readiness. However, not all of them achieved the desired results. Now, I systematically receive data regarding developmental student persistence and sequence completion. I review these data with the administrative and faculty leadership during bi-monthly meetings of the Planning and Development Council, the President's Administrative Staff, and divisional meetings. Progress is monitored every semester and we keep asking the question of ourselves: "How can we improve?"

Encouraging Faculty and Staff Participation

It has always been my philosophy to encourage input from faculty and staff in the decision-making process, especially when it comes to facilitating student success. I want broad-based participation because I find it leads to better decision making and greater acceptance of institutional decisions. To improve student success rates, both inside and outside the classroom, stakeholders from the faculty, staff, and administrative groups participated in the DEI planning committee. To accomplish the contextualization of the developmental reading and developmental writing curricula, which was one of our DEI strategies, the Developmental Education faculty worked collaboratively with faculty from the sociology and history departments. By engaging all affected faculty groups in the curriculum

“By engaging all affected faculty groups in the curriculum development process, we achieved buy-in.”

development process, we achieved buy-in. To provide case management services to students participating in the DEI program, student success specialists learned how to use STC's existing Comprehensive Advising system. This collaboration by staff members ensured a high quality of service to students, and instilled confidence in the DEI stakeholders that students were receiving the information that they needed to succeed.

To broaden participation beyond the personnel who are directly affected by DEI, I share student success data—including developmental student success rates—with all STC faculty and staff members during our semi-annual College-Wide Professional Development Days. At the spring 2012 professional development day, faculty and staff members engaged in a role-playing exercise in which they acted as college-ready students, underprepared students, full-time students, or part-time students. As faculty and staff members experienced a taste of students' circumstances they became more aware of the challenges, including institutional factors, that contribute to only 22% of our entering students earning an associate degree within three years. This exercise evoked passionate responses from many faculty and staff members, according to follow-up surveys.

During DEI, the feedback that college personnel received from our developmental education consultants encouraged us and helped increase momentum: buy-in by the program chair led to departmental support. Along the way we learned that contextualized curricula are rigorous to teach and that some faculty members were uncomfortable with the change. In order to achieve student success benchmarks, we determined that we had to explain more fully the need for changes.

Addressing a Disquieting Concern

Another disquieting concern has lingered with me even as STC and our students made progress during DEI. I have lost sleep pondering whether we are doing more harm than good with the current, traditional model of placing students in developmental education courses based on placement test scores. My lingering fear is that despite the noble intention of mandatory placement of students in developmental education, we are driving them away from community colleges. Large numbers of students do not accept the need to be placed in developmental education programs and instead choose to leave our institutions. Once students who are not college-ready leave community colleges, they have few other options.

STC tried the “tough love” strategy of requiring students to take developmental education courses in all areas of deficiency. For many students, this meant developmental courses in math, reading, and English. The fall-to-fall retention rate for part-time students in developmental education dropped to less than 20%, which was about 13% lower than their full-time peers’ retention rate. Since we stopped the prescriptive practice, part-time students who previously gave up because they could only take developmental courses have returned and retention of full-time students increased by 11%. Our data are not conclusive and I am not aware of national data on this question, but at this point I feel it is a better option to place students directly in academic courses with supplemental instruction and other support services. At least then students have a 50–50 chance to complete the course.

Going forward, STC will continue practices that have been effective for our students. The contextualized curriculum component of the DEI grant will be offered in all developmental writing and reading classes. The two-course developmental education sequence piloted as a part of STC’s Quality Enhancement Plan has been scaled. We plan to maintain momentum by seeking new and innovative initiatives and practices, learning from both successes and mistakes, and by keeping the college community and other stakeholders informed through regular communication.

Without a doubt, STC will face challenges as we move forward. These challenges include reductions in state funding for initiatives and special programs. Funding cuts will make it difficult to provide the faculty professional development necessary to achieve our goal of improving completion rates in the developmental education sequence and college-level courses. However, as president of STC, I will not lose focus on developmental education, the progress of students in this area, their success, and ultimately the success of community colleges.

Shirley A. Reed, Ed.D., has served as the president of South Texas College since it was founded in 1994.

El Paso Community College

DEI Bringing Innovative Projects into College Culture

By William Serrata
President, El Paso Community College



Like many of the country's community colleges, El Paso Community College (EPCC) represents an entry point to higher education programs that will provide personal, financial, and social benefits. EPCC envisions every entering student being provided with an education to help them acquire these benefits. Before Achieving the Dream (ATD), the college's vision was not being fully achieved by large numbers of students. With Developmental Education Initiative (DEI) funding, we were able to scale promising interventions.

During my ATD and DEI work at South Texas College, where I served as vice president for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management prior to my appointment as El Paso Community College's president in 2012, it became apparent to me that developmental education, particularly developmental math, required additional efforts to move students efficiently through developmental education courses and into credit bearing coursework. My EPCC colleagues' work on DEI and our next steps with Texas Completes—a credential completion effort by five large Texas community colleges to create a unified student success pathway—will keep EPCC moving forward by further facilitating our connections with high schools and allowing successful entry, progression, and completion of programs by more students. DEI truly allows community colleges to accelerate students' progress from college entry to credential completion.

Accomplishing Meaningful, Sustainable Changes

Richard Rhodes, former EPCC president and current Austin Community College president, summarizes the critical step that led to sustainable innovations at EPCC as “seeing Achieving the Dream and the Developmental Education Initiative not as initiatives off to the side, but bringing them into the college culture. Constantly communicating the objectives of the initiatives and allowing faculty and staff opportunities to drive them is critical.”

After receiving one of ATD's first round awards, EPCC spent a year reviewing student achievement data and forming strategies and activities for making EPCC's vision attainable by more students. To have broad, college-wide engagement, an ATD Strategy Team was formed with vice presidents, deans, directors of student support services, representative faculty, staff, and student leaders. Creating a culture of evidence played a prominent role at Strategy Team meetings. The team reviewed data and began conversations to answer many questions: What needed to be addressed? What strategic directions were needed? How would activities evolve? Who would shoulder the responsibility for each strategic direction? What measures were needed to create a culture of evidence? How would we know if these strategies were moving the college forward?

Because the work was comprehensive and needed to be sustainable, the college's vice presidents were charged with overseeing ATD's strategies within their

“Constantly communicating the objectives of the initiatives and allowing faculty and staff opportunities to drive them is critical.”

respective divisions. To build capacity and sustain a culture of evidence, a Faculty Data and Research Team was formed to work closely with Institutional Research on internal evaluative measures. ATD strategies were designed to strengthen college readiness through the College Readiness Consortium, form collaborative relationships among developmental education areas through the Developmental Education Council, and support first-time-in-college students through the PREP (Pretesting Retesting Educational Program), student support services, and the redesigned developmental education math curriculum. The College Readiness Consortium is a collaboration with the University of Texas at El Paso and school districts to address barriers to students’ successful transition from high school to college. The Developmental Education Council is a standing college committee that focuses on improving developmental education.

At our initial College Readiness Consortium meeting, EPCC invited superintendents from three urban independent school districts, the regional educational service center director, the four-year university partner provost, our parallel administrative team from the college, and key personnel from each entity. The meeting started with a shared message: As educators of our community, our work would benefit the community of El Paso and surrounding areas. Placement data was shared showing the high percentage of recent high school graduates placing in the three developmental areas of English, math, and reading. This was a risky, but highly effective way to start because it led to strategic placement testing in high schools and strengthened our K-16 partnership. “Courageous conversations,” like the one EPCC convened with its region’s educational leaders, have become part of the culture at ATD institutions.

Addressing the Scaling Challenge

Another lesson learned by ATD participants is that promising interventions only last if they are sustained, scaled, and become incorporated into the usual practices of the college’s administration, faculty, and staff. Following EPCC’s successful ATD experiences, the college received DEI funding to scale and build to sustain its most

promising developmental education interventions. To transition from ATD to DEI and broaden engagement, EPCC morphed its Strategy Team into a Student Success Team. Team meetings addressed the challenges of turning small interventions into scalable, sustainable practices. With DEI, EPCC scaled PREP, the Math Emporium, and its student support system through a variety of case management strategies. These included mentoring and case management counseling, as well as activities to support new student orientation.

Scaling was a major challenge because it was not simply a matter of buying more technology or providing more professional development. For EPCC, scaling meant expanding facilities on all five campuses to provide new delivery venues that allow students to engage in competency-based learning. To do this, the DEI director created implementation teams. Team members included campus math coordinators, the president's executive assistant, IT staff, and representatives from all areas of facilities. Meetings facilitated planning for construction, purchase, and installation of technology and furniture for each of the campuses. Implementation teams operated under the assumption that the daily practice of interventions would occur in classrooms on all EPCC campuses and with the attention of student support services personnel, who proved to be vital in facilitating student success and providing supportive and complimentary experiences in and outside classrooms. Preliminary results indicate fewer students withdraw from Math Emporium sections than from traditional sections. In intensive five-week courses in the summer, some students are even completing two courses.

ATD and DEI have fueled larger, statewide efforts and brought developmental education to the forefront in creating major Texas state education policy changes. The majority of EPCC's DEI interventions have been continued and are operating at scale district-wide. These accomplishments are due largely to the college investing the time to cultivate the buy-in of faculty and staff. During my time at South Texas College, similar positive results occurred during DEI because of initial efforts to gain the support of faculty and staff. As Richard Rhodes says, "You have to find ways to gain buy-in from faculty, staff, and students. It takes time. Providing data so people can see and understand the urgency, so people can see and connect it to what you are saying, helps with creating buy-in."

EPCC's next steps include designing a Completion Pathway for students with enough flexibility to accommodate population needs and adhere to basic design principles that ensure its integrity as a district-wide effort. Increasing the number of students who complete credentials remains a priority for EPCC and an essential component of my vision for the college's future.

William Serrata, Ph.D., became president of El Paso Community College in August 2012.

Cuyahoga Community College

Approaching Developmental Education as an Opportunity, Rather than a Problem, Brings Rewards

By Jerry Sue Thornton
President, Cuyahoga Community College



When Cuyahoga Community College was selected in 2009 to participate in the Developmental Education Initiative (DEI), it joined some very prestigious community colleges in seeking new ways of supporting students during their academic pursuits. Having been an Achieving the Dream (ATD) college, we were prepared to build on lessons we had learned during this student success initiative. As we built our college team for the emerging DEI endeavor, we reflected on the philosophy that Stephen R. Covey presented in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, particularly his suggestion to “begin with the end in mind.” It was very important to us to focus on *why* we were involved in DEI, how our results could make a positive difference in students’ lives, and what we could do that would enable us to continue our successes when the grant concluded. This reframing of our organizational goals energized our desire to enhance and expand our ATD work through DEI.

As a college, we had become increasingly comfortable with understanding and using data as an innate part of our decision-making and planning for scaling successful projects, such as our use of supplemental instruction in math classes. We documented improvements in student academic progress by reducing the time it took students to complete developmental course sequences as a result of accelerated and bridge programs. We witnessed higher numbers of students completing courses when assigned to mentors and success courses, and experienced growth in student persistence in subsequent semesters as we championed increased use of technology-based tools, such as our Degree Audit Requirement System, which helps students determine their degree completion requirements.

Activating ‘Change Masters’

We knew as an organization that while we had experienced some successes through ATD, we were entering new territory with DEI. We knew this new territory could make us the “change masters” that Rosabeth Moss Kanter wrote about in her book by the same title. DEI called us to create an environment where even more innovation could flourish. It asked us to embrace flexibility. It expected even greater collaboration. To reinvent developmental education at our college, our DEI team would have to become, as Kanter wrote, “adept at the art of anticipating the need for, and of leading, productive change.”

Our first consideration was environmental, which translated to a review of those organizational and cultural factors that could support our goals. With faculty being the centerpiece of education, we knew that our DEI work must be faculty-led and have faculty involvement. Thus, we approached the president of our faculty collective bargaining organization, the American Association of University Professors, to request that a long-term faculty member be given extended release time under our Professional Improvement Leave category to become the DEI Team

“DEI called us to create an environment where even more innovation could flourish. It asked us to embrace flexibility. It expected even greater collaboration.”

Project Leader. We were able to secure the services of a 30-year English professor, who then worked with our DEI team to develop a multi-centric approach to our strategies. This approach created an infrastructure in which the students and faculty were the heart of the circle toward which all other people, activities, and technology intersected for change.

Marshalling Resources

With faculty-student engagement as a critical component of the initial achievements and long-term sustainability, it was essential for the college to direct the appropriate resources and refine our processes to support the teaching-learning integrated team approach of our DEI work. The college

- recruited faculty with an interest in changing the developmental education paradigm.
- developed a computer SharePoint site for faculty and others engaged in the initiative.
- formed learning centers for idea sharing and collaboration.
- established “coffee and conversation” times for faculty.
- improved communication between faculty and tutors for consistency and continuity.
- provided a process for counselor input and information exchange.
- implemented ongoing, train-the-trainer professional development for faculty.
- created Collaborative Learning and Supplemental Instruction spaces throughout the college.

Exceeding Goals

Not only did we achieve our stated DEI goals for improving student success in developmental education, but through the DEI experience we achieved new ways of communicating, partnering, and implementing strategies that have enhanced student success college wide. We openly share this information with all college stakeholders at town hall meetings, convocations, and other organizational gatherings. New structures such as our Developmental Education Council—made up of faculty, administrators, and staff from all four campuses—provide opportunities for engaging in “courageous conversations” and vetting of promising practices. Council accomplishments include the use of data to adjust course prerequisites, the development of tool kits for adjunct faculty, and the launch of new assessments and prep modules to improve accuracy in student placements.

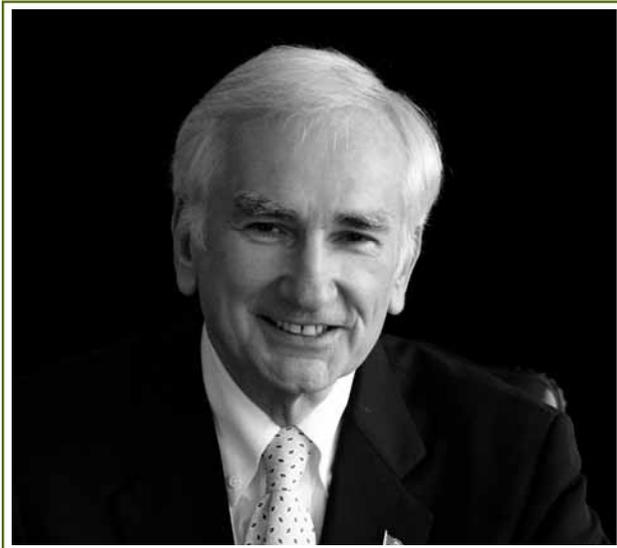
Our experience in DEI went well beyond the intended goals. It helped us find new ways to engage in a multifaceted effort that focuses on students and faculty and surrounds them with inclusive, innovative, and integrated educational approaches. With DEI, developmental education became an opportunity rather than an insoluble problem. Consequently, the endeavor has been far more rewarding.

Jerry Sue Thornton, Ph.D., has been president of Cuyahoga Community College since 1992.

Danville Community College

Integrating Reaccreditation with Other Student Success Initiatives Creates Synergy

By B. Carlyle Ramsey
President, Danville Community College



Danville Community College's (DCC) commitment to improving student success has been significantly enhanced by the college's participation in Achieving the Dream (ATD) as one of the Lumina Foundation-funded pilot colleges in 2004, and later as a Leader College in 2010. Our ATD experience unquestionably placed DCC in a competitive position to be selected to participate in the Developmental Educational Initiative (DEI). Both ATD and DEI have been integrated into the college's culture. Each has had a powerful, profound effect on the college community—students, faculty, staff, the college and educational foundation boards, and community partners.

“It was exciting to be a part of a national initiative with multiple partners that was redefining and redirecting student success.”

Groundwork for DEI

Yet, DCC had begun to move toward making a number of strategic changes relative to student success measures and effectiveness several years before we became a part of ATD. In 2003 we were gearing up for our ten-year reaccreditation under the auspices of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The newly implemented SACS Principles of Accreditation placed greater emphasis on effective evaluation of student learning outcomes and success. Then, in 2004, we received a Title III Strengthening Institutions Programs grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The primary focus of our Title III project was the reform and improvement of developmental education. With our selection in 2004 as a first-round ATD college, we immediately began the type of “courageous conversations” we learned about at the Summer ATD Kickoff Institute held in Austin, Texas, in June 2004. The courageous conversations DCC convened with its many constituencies led to the decision to integrate all the new and exciting initiatives (with DEI yet to come) into our SACS Quality Enhancement Plan. We named our strategic planning process a “Vision to Action.”

Taking the integrated approach was clearly one of the most judicious and critical decisions we made. While not easy, the integrated approach created enormous synergy and the three grant initiatives served as a huge catalytic agent for change. Moreover, there was greater clarity, direction, and a more effective use of people (including coaches and technical assistance) and resources. It was exciting to be a part of a national initiative with multiple partners that was redefining and redirecting student success.

Our efforts to advance the student success agenda have focused on the following:

1. Realigning and reorganizing the college's organizational structure
2. Reviewing programs, curricula, courses, and services
3. Expanding professional development for full- and part-time faculty and staff
4. Grooming a new generation of leaders
5. Creating a more robust culture of evidence
6. Investing in and utilizing more technology
7. Improving awareness and communications
8. Developing strategies for scaling and sustaining

Bumps in the Road

Both ATD and DEI have become a part of DCC's modus operandi to achieve student success. Have there been a few bumps in the road? Obviously, yes, but we learned and profited from some of the less successful launches. For example, the PK-12 partnerships have been somewhat challenging, specifically for DEI, due in part to leadership changes in the school divisions or on campus (e.g., when the first dean of Student Success and Academic Advancement left to be an academic vice president). The Math Summer Bridge Program also started modestly, but we have regained traction and momentum with the 2012 experience. So we have had many "Oh, no!" as well as "Aha!" moments. One of the "Aha!" moments validated the new student success division. Another was ending late registration.

The college and its external and internal constituent groups remain committed to student success. We will continue to build on our accomplishments and to learn from our experiences as we endeavor to help students overcome barriers so they can attain a degree (or another credential) and pursue a promising career.

B. Carlyle Ramsey, Ph.D., has been president of Danville Community College since 1992.

Coastal Bend College

New President Decides How to Build on DEI

By Beatriz T. Espinoza
President, Coastal Bend College



Since June 2012 when I became president, I have gained new insights about the large number of Coastal Bend College students who require at least one level of developmental course work in reading, writing, or mathematics. My initial impression was that not everyone in our college community understood what we were doing to help meet our students' developmental education needs or the high level of assistance these students require. During my first few months on the job I learned more about the college's DEI work and the efforts of Thomas B. Baynum, the previous president, to share student success data and improvement strategies with the college community.

I now understand that DEI changed the way the college operates. DEI led to the implementation of the following ongoing policies, practices, and programs:

1. Mandatory preparation for placement exams
2. Targeted professional development to meet the needs of developmental education students
3. More printed materials on data and descriptors
4. Earlier registration periods
5. Intrusive advising with dedicated faculty advisors and case managers
6. Integrated curricula to expand marketable skills and level I and II certificate options
7. Fast-track courses in reading and English and an Accelerated English Learning Community
8. A Strategic Enrollment Management Committee to realign academic pathways for ABE/GED and ESL students
9. A four-year rotating review of the retention, persistence, transition, matriculation, and graduation rates of all programs

Adjusting Innovations to Budget Realities

Unfortunately, as the newcomer facing significant fiscal challenges, my "Aha!" moment regarding DEI occurred as part of the decision-making process about what strategies could be sustained and what aspects would inform our next steps. My key lesson is about the need to plan better for the absorption of successful interventions into the college budget. Half of the college's DEI innovations took dedicated funds and realistically require a three-to-five-year window to integrate computer labs, professional development, print materials, and other items into the financial planning cycle. The other half of our DEI innovations require staff commitment to change things like course schedules and advising services.

It is incredibly difficult to discontinue successful or promising interventions. So, as much as possible, we have tried to adjust the innovations to retain the essential benefits for students within the realities of our finances.

Coastal Bend College's Math Emporium was designed to fast-track students through the developmental math sequence. A classroom solely dedicated to the Math Emporium concept was equipped with new computers and furniture. The implementation struggled initially because the first math instructor either did not understand the model or was unwilling to institute it. When results improved with another faculty member the college learned the imperative of faculty "buy-in." In addition to the pedagogical skills required of the instructor, the Math Emporium model uses a degreed assistant to work with the instructor in the emporium classroom. This position, however, could not be funded in the 2012-2013 budget. Thanks to the math faculty's work with a developmental education consultant during DEI, the college has compressed the developmental math sequence from three courses into two. So, despite the discontinuation of the Math Emporium model, we hope the accelerated format will help students speed through their developmental math requirements.

During DEI, four case managers were used throughout the college for an effective early alert and retention referral system. The case managers contacted and advised students who had attendance or academic issues, or other problems. Data indicate that the students who were assigned case managers persisted and achieved at higher levels than those students who did not receive case management services. But again this personnel cost is simply more than the college can afford at this time.

The college has the capacity to continue the FLEX or Fast Track reading and English courses and the Accelerated English Learning Community courses as they were developed during DEI. The FLEX courses have the "meat" of the regular developmental courses, meet daily, and move at a faster pace. They make it possible for students to complete two English courses and two reading courses in two semesters. The Learning Community serves students who need the last developmental English course. Instead of taking this course, the students take a college-level English course that is paired with the college success course. Both courses are taught by the same instructor.

In addition to adjusting the interventions creatively, we also are devoting external and internal funding to accomplish the tasks previously supported by our DEI grant. For instance, we have used a Title V grant from the U.S. Department of Education to purchase early alert retention software that will help us identify students in need of intervention. The federal grant also has allowed us to employ two student success coordinators who will assist the identified students albeit at a smaller scale than the case managers did during DEI. We are devoting convocations

“As much as possible, we have tried to adjust the innovations to retain the essential benefits for students within the realities of our finances.”

and in-service opportunities to provide concentrated instruction to help faculty provide academic guidance to students. As faculty become more involved in advising and mentoring, non-faculty advisors will assume more direct case management roles. The college is also developing a new student success course after feedback from many college stakeholders identified this need as the focus of the Quality Enhancement Plan for our reaccreditation.

I am determined not only to continue the work of the both DEI and Achieving the Dream, but to make these initiatives a more obvious part of Coastal Bend College's culture. The college has passionate educators who like me are motivated rather than hindered by our financial limitations and the challenges of having four campuses spread over nine rural counties. I accept the responsibility of conveying the student success message to our faculty and staff so that together we can create a culture that embraces our students and addresses their needs.

Beatriz T. Espinoza, Ph.D., became president of Coastal Bend College in 2012.



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