Tallahassee Community College
Tallahassee, Florida / www.tcc.fl.edu

Tallahassee Community College (TCC) receives special recognition for its broad engagement strategy, specifically its outreach to the residents of Gadsden County. In 2004, Florida state officials reported alarming rates of infant mortality and unemployment in the rural county near Tallahassee. Numerous schools were failing and many students were dropping out of high school. With Public Agenda, TCC conducted community conversations, which led to a 10-point action plan. The college helped secure more than $16 million for the Gadsden County community. In 2005, TCC established Quincy House to provide after-school programs, a computer lab, Tech @ Night classes as well as GED and adult literacy instruction. TCC's initiatives were among the collaborative efforts that by 2008 helped more than half of the public schools in Gadsden County attain A or B ratings, and improve graduation rates. TCC has also made an extraordinary effort to include its board of trustees in its college-wide development of a culture of evidence that makes student success everyone's responsibility. Before each regular monthly meeting, the board participates in a 90-minute workshop on a strategic plan goal.

Patrick Henry Community College
Martinsville, Virginia / www.ph.vccs.edu

Patrick Henry Community College (PHCC) receives special recognition for cooperative learning. The college shifted from lecture-based classes to cooperative learning to enhance low-income and underprepared students' engagement, persistence, critical thinking, and academic success. Nearly all full-time faculty and almost half of PHCC's part-time instructors have received professional development in cooperative learning strategies. The college also added electronic tools and new furniture to make classrooms more conducive for the small group work of cooperative learning. In a 2008 survey of Virginia's 23 community colleges, PHCC was ranked second in active and collaborative learning. The college also focuses on students' first-year experiences to address the trend of freshmen dropping out during spring semester. Mentoring, case-management advising, and special services at a comprehensive math lab are among the support systems the college has added to address the needs of at-risk students, particularly during their first year.

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Achieving the Dream National Partners: American Association of Community Colleges ■ Community College Leadership Program, University of Texas-Austin ■ Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University ■ Jobs for the Future ■ MDC, Inc. (managing partner) ■ MDRC ■ Public Agenda

Achieving the Dream Honors
Valencia Community College
VCC Receives Inaugural $25,000 Award

Lumina Foundation for Education created this award for institutional transformation in 2008 in honor of Leah Meyer Austin, its former Senior Vice President for Program Development and Organizational Learning. Her visionary leadership shaped the development of the national Achieving the Dream initiative to improve student success at the nation's community colleges, particularly for students of color and low-income students. This award is open solely to institutions actively affiliated with Achieving the Dream. Aligning with the goals and values of Achieving the Dream, this leadership award recognizes outstanding institutional achievement in creating excellence and equity through:

- committed leadership;
- documented student success strategies;
- broad engagement strategies;
- use of evidence to improve programs, policies and practices; and
- systemic institutional improvement.

The winning college may use the $25,000 cash award for any student success purpose it deems appropriate.

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Learning Communities Close Achievement Gaps

Valencia Community College was selected as the first winner of the Leah Meyer Austin Institutional Student Success Leadership Award for its excellent execution of data-informed initiatives to close performance gaps among students from different ethnic and economic backgrounds. The systemic strategies developed collaboratively by Valencia's faculty and staff are also improving the success rates of all students in the gatekeeper courses they target. "It's really been a breakthrough for a lot of students," said Vice President for Academic Affairs Ann E. Puyana of the learning community efforts Valencia scaled up on its four campuses.

Achieving the Dream Process. Valencia has a long history of commitment to student success and attentiveness to under-prepared students. When it joined Achieving the Dream in 2005, the college examined more than 100 different improvement strategies, many of which were already being implemented; the challenge now was to move from "dabbling in the right things" to large-scale commitment to specific strategies and an analysis of their impact. Achieving the Dream provided the structure Valencia needed to dig deeper into its internal research data and focus its resources. By studying the intersection between its highest enrollment courses and those in which students were least successful, the college identified major achievement gaps across racial and ethnic groups; between college-ready and under-prepared students; and between student performance in mathematics courses

compared to courses in other disciplines.

Achieving the Dream came at the right developmental moment for Valencia, notes Susan Kelley, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, because the initiative's "intentionality of institutionalizing right up front" set it apart from many previous efforts and got the attention of all the college's stakeholders.

The college used "Big Meetings" to share research, gather input, and work toward consensus on what strategies to pursue. The college-wide "Big Meetings" and smaller working groups continue to function as college personnel analyze results and respond to student performance data. Valencia's leaders say Achieving the Dream's requirement for collective decision making and detailed planning has fostered a disciplined process that is yielding better decisions and embedding student achievement goals and activities into the culture of the college.

To maximize the potential to improve students' learning and success, several hundred faculty and staff members were prompted by President Sanford C. Shugart and the ATD Core Team to select strategies based on their effectiveness, scalability, and "ripeness." "Ripeness" refers to strategies Valencia personnel knew to be effective with their students and that the college had the capability to implement across campuses and academic disciplines.

Valencia chose to focus its intervention strategies on three pre-college mathematics courses, an English composition course, a U.S. government course, and a college-level algebra course. The strategies for addressing these "high-risk courses" employ three arrangements of learning communities to cultivate student success. They were implemented in four phases beginning in the 2005-06 academic year.

PHASE

1 **Supplemental Learning** was added first to the three pre-college mathematics courses and then to the other three courses that many incoming students find most difficult. Valencia hired successful students and educated them as peer mentors who sit in on the classes and offer voluntary class review sessions where students learn to work together to solve problems. The sessions help students learn both the course content and how to learn.

PHASE

2 **Learning in Community (LinC)** coordinates instruction in two courses for students who attend the linked courses together. In most instances, the linked courses are one of the developmental mathematics courses and the three-credit Student Life Skills course that has a long association with improved student performance. The block-scheduled courses are staffed simultaneously by two instructors and a success coach from the Student Services Department, who coordinate instructional activities and assessments. This supportive community provides students with the resources to become enabled, empowered learners.

PHASE

3 Valencia expanded the linked courses to include the composition, U.S. government, and college-level algebra courses with courses in other disciplines.

PHASE

4 The college required students who test into all three developmental disciplines (reading, writing, and mathematics) to enroll in the Student Life Skills course, and also studied the possibility of mandating the Student Life Skills course for students who test into two of these developmental courses.

Results

More than 29,000 Valencia students have taken at least one of the six gateway courses (four math courses, English Composition, and U.S. Government) targeted by Achieving the Dream since 2005-2006. In general, students' performance has improved in all six gateway courses. The average success rate for all ethnicities in these six courses improved from 62.6% in 2004 to 65.6% in 2008.

Success rate gaps compared to Caucasian students varied from year to year among these six courses. The success rate for Caucasians held steady from 2004 to 2008 at approximately 64.5%. For the six gateway courses combined, Hispanic students lagged behind Caucasians in 2004 but outperformed them in 2008. African Americans also closed the gap but have not quite achieved the average benchmark success rate. The goal is to create conditions for student learning that improve success for all students and eliminate the predictability of success or failure based on demographic factors.

The college funded 80% of its Achieving the Dream work with its own resources, not grant funds, and plans to continue scaling up solutions that make the intended positive impact on students' performance.

SUCCESS RATE BY ENTHICITY **ENGLISH COMPOSITION**
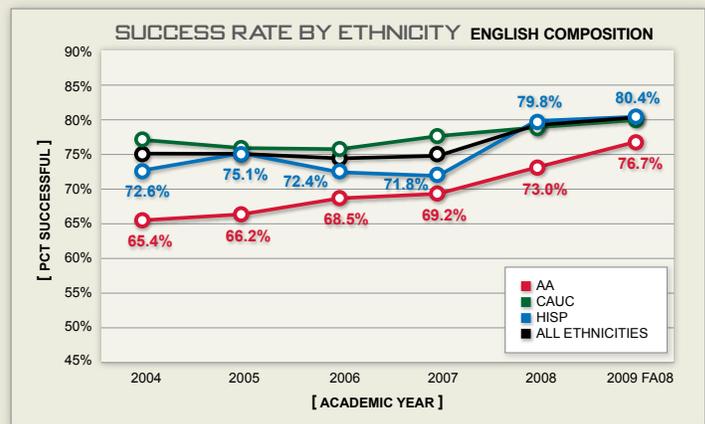
The performance of all students in English Composition improved by more than 4% with 79.2% of 2,560 students passing the course in the 2008 academic year, compared with 75.1% (1,225 of 1,632 students) in the 2004 academic year. In 2008, 73.0% (222 of 304) of the African American students in the required course completed it successfully compared with 65.4% (117 of 179) of African American students who took the course in 2004. Hispanic students also improved: 79.8% (534 of 669) of Hispanic students passed in 2008 compared with 72.6% (247 of 340) in 2004. The gap between African American and Caucasian students decreased from 11.7% to 5.9%. By 2008, the performance of Hispanic students, on average, surpassed Caucasian students (4.4% behind in 2004 to 0.9% ahead in 2008).

SUCCESS RATE BY ETHNICITY **COLLEGE ALGEBRA**
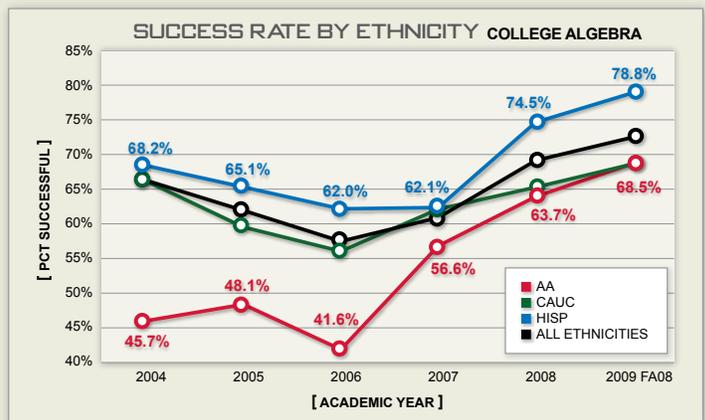
Overall student performance in College Algebra improved by 2008 when 69.0% (740 of 1,073) of the Valencia students enrolled in the course succeeded compared with 66.1% passing in 2005. Hispanic students made gains with 74.5% (199 of 267) passing in 2008 compared with 68.2% (88 of 129) in 2004. In 2008, 63.7% (58 of 91) of African American students passed the course that only 45.7% (16 of 35) had passed in 2004. Hispanic students, on average, outperformed Caucasian students by 9.4% in 2008 compared to 2.2% better in 2004. The gap between African American and Caucasian students closed from 20.3% in 2004 to only 1.4% in 2008.

GATEWAY COURSE SUCCESS RATE GAP
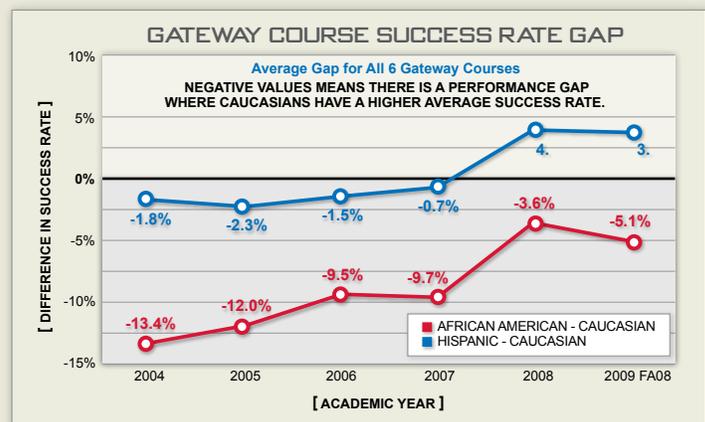
The average gap in success rate between African Americans and Caucasians for all six of the Gateway Courses combined (straight average, not weighted average) closed from 13.4% in 2004 to 3.6% in 2008. The average gap between Hispanics and Caucasians reversed itself with Hispanics trailing in success rate by 1.8% in 2004 and leading by 4.0% in 2008. Results for academic year 2009 include only the Fall term, but so far the results are holding near the 2008 level.