

LEAH MEYER AUSTIN AWARD 2014

DREAM



ACHIEVING THE DREAM HONORS Montgomery County Community College

This year, Achieving the Dream recognizes two first-place winners of the Leah Meyer Austin award, Bunker Hill Community College and Montgomery County Community College, for building whole-college solutions to improve student success and equity, adapted to meet the specific needs of their student body, that have resulted in noteworthy increases in student success.

The Leah Meyer Austin Award was established in 2008 to recognize outstanding achievement in supporting and promoting student success through the creation of a culture of evidence, continuous

improvement, systemic institutional change, broad engagement of stakeholders, and equity, with particular attention to low-income students and students of color. Each winning Achieving the Dream institution is awarded a \$25,000 prize in support of their student success efforts. The 2014 Leah Meyer Austin Award is made possible by the generous support of The Leona M. & Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust and is given in honor of Leah Meyer Austin, former Senior Vice President for Program Development and Organizational Learning at the Lumina Foundation, whose visionary leadership shaped the development of Achieving the Dream.

Montgomery County Community College

Blue Bell, Pennsylvania • Karen A. Stout, President
www.mc3.edu

Montgomery County Community College (MCCC) receives the 2014 Leah Meyer Austin Award for working effectively to help every student achieve his or her education goals. The president, trustees, staff, and faculty—both part-time and full-time—move forward with the understanding that individuals' success in higher education has the potential for positive, multi-generation effects on families and communities. Through implementation of Achieving the Dream's Student-Centered Model of Institutional Improvement, MCCC has built whole-college solutions to improve student success and equity, tailored to the unique needs of its student body.

With student success at the heart of its strategic plan, MCCC developed practices and procedures designed to realize this goal, and the individual goals of each student. Such laser-sharp focus on student success has led to college-wide, data-informed decision making resulting in:

- Reduced new students' placement in developmental English by 31 percentage points without impacting their subsequent success in college-level English
- Increased success rates among the highest-need developmental education students by as much as 20 percentage points by scaling a redesigned course—Concepts of Numbers—that is being replicated at 10 other colleges
- Improved the college readiness of students in feeder high schools by as much as 63 percentage points through a variety of policy and procedure changes, student support services, and course redesigns
- Increased persistence among new students by 10 percentage points with pedagogical improvements in gateway courses and reconfiguration of the system-wide master schedule to make it easier for students to enroll in these high-demand courses
- Improved minority men's persistence by an average of 15 percentage points through mentoring

MCCC became part of Achieving the Dream in 2006 and has been recognized as a Leader College within the Network since 2011 for its successful redesign of developmental math, comprehensive student support services, and dedication to the Achieving the Dream principles. Approximately one-third of the suburban college's 13,122 students are minority students, and more than one-third of all students receive Pell grants. Alongside implementation of comprehensive reforms, the college president and board have supported bold interventions to address the unique needs of relatively small, previously underserved populations.

Building Faculty Engagement

President Karen A. Stout has been leading the college since 2001 and is most proud of faculty attention to what is happening in classrooms, improvement strategies, and student outcomes data. "We have a much larger group of faculty engaged intentionally in this work than we did when we first got involved with Achieving the Dream," President Stout said.

The college's continuous improvement strategy has gained momentum in recent years with the addition of professional development to its Gateway Academy. Since 2008, the academy has been a collegial support community for faculty who teach 14 gateway courses. The college's decision to use the \$5,000 prize money from the 2011 Leah Meyer Austin Special Recognition Award to offer professional development for gateway faculty is emblematic of MCCC's priorities. This professional development program guided faculty through evaluations of their instructional practices and identified places where students encounter barriers. Faculty came out of the academy inspired to develop supports to help students complete gateway courses.

"That is really beginning to have a ripple effect throughout the institution around faculty engagement," President Stout said. She noted that while some in-class improvements are difficult to quantify immediately, scores on assessment rubrics and course success rates are increasing.

"That willingness to look at data, and address the gaps that are revealed, is pretty much pervasive in our culture. While a faculty member may not have served on the Achieving the Dream Core Team [which has rotating membership] ... they're certainly thinking about the student success goal," President Stout said.

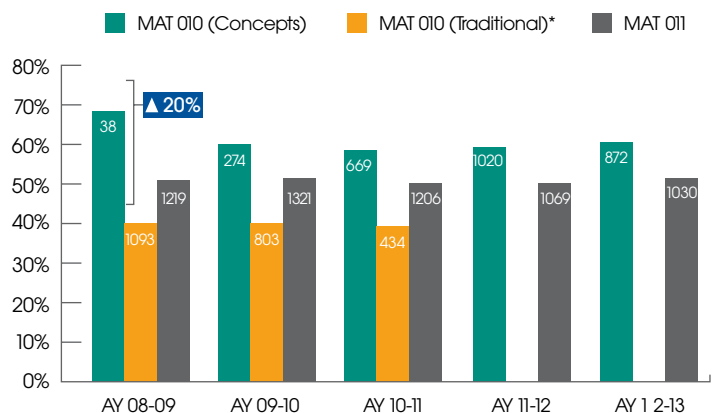
Redesigning Developmental Education

Math

Changes to the developmental math sequence are an example of the college's openness to faculty-devised solutions that eventually lead to scalable improvements. One of MCCC's first Achieving the Dream innovations was the Concepts of Numbers (MAT 010) course developed for the lowest-performing developmental math students by Barbara Lontz, an assistant professor of mathematics. The course teaches basic arithmetic concepts in practical contexts, using discovery methods that encourage students first to solve problems using fractions, decimals, and percents, and then to focus on the algorithms.

After students in the pilot versions of the Concepts for Numbers course consistently outperformed students in the traditional arithmetic course, it was scaled. By 2011 it replaced the traditional course. The curriculum and pedagogy are so effective for some students that when they retake the math placement test at the end of the semester, they score well enough to enroll in college-level mathematics, skipping over the rest of the developmental math sequence. (MCCC has two developmental math levels.)

The Concepts of Numbers Course Improves Student Success Without Negative Impact in the Next Course, MAT 011



In addition to teaching the Concepts for Numbers course at MCCC, Lontz is helping ten other colleges adopt it.

English

MCCC has also been working to reform its developmental English sequence to serve students better. Results include a dramatic drop in students placing into the sequence from 1,471 students in 2008 to 311 in 2012.

This transformation illustrates the college's willingness to make policy changes that align with student success. For example, the college lowered the cut-off score for students to qualify for college-level courses, adopted a new placement exam, and implemented a policy that waives the placement exam for students who score 500 or more on the English portion of the SAT.

These changes have doubled the number of students who place directly into college-level English without sacrificing their performance in college-level English courses. A 2011 study found that the students who qualified for placement in college-level English 101 by these alternative means performed as well or better than all other students in the course.

Reconfiguring Policies and Processes

Throughout its Achieving the Dream journey, MCCC's systematic use of data has informed policy decisions on admissions, grading, and academic program reviews resulting in students improving their academic success and gaining a quicker, less expensive route to their academic goals.

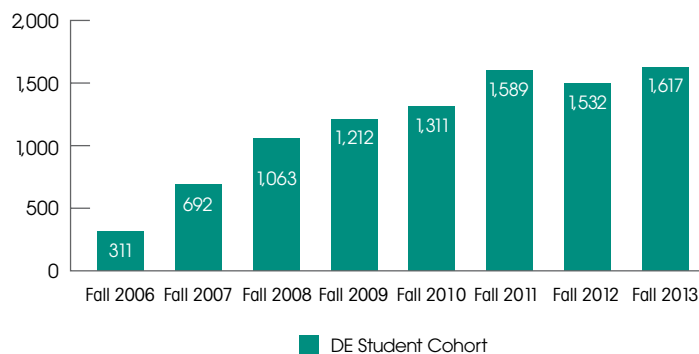
For instance, in 2011 the college tightened course alignment and credit requirements to facilitate students' academic progress toward completion of credentials through institutional policy review. Since 2011, data indicate that more students, as a proportion of the student population, are completing degrees at higher rates than ever at MCCC. By utilizing its scheduling software for college-wide, rather than departmental scheduling, MCCC also set conflict-free course times for as many students as possible. Early results of the streamlined course portfolio are promising: the spring-to-fall 2013 persistence rate for new students was 65 percent compared to 55 percent for spring-to-fall 2012.

Engaging External Stakeholders

In addition to engaging faculty and staff in reforms, MCCC also recognizes the important role the local community and other educational institutions play in helping students achieve their goals. During the past three years MCCC's collaborations with 22 feeder school districts have developed along with the establishment of 24 program-to-program agreements and 14 articulation agreements with high schools.

MCCC now combines dual enrollment programs with customized college readiness efforts. Advising staff also try to connect students with career pathways by providing guidance to particular programs or majors. As a result, dual enrollments have grown from 311 in 2006 to 1,617 in fall 2013.

A. Growth in Dual Enrollment Parallels Improvements in College Readiness



In September 2013, the college began its Gateway to College program with 21 high school students who had dropped out or who were at risk of dropping out. MCCC is one of two Pennsylvania colleges and one of 43 higher education institutions nationally involved in the Gateway to College National Network.

Recognizing that preparing students to obtain a bachelor's degree is a key role of community colleges, MCCC recently began an ambitious new partnership with Drexel University, a nearby research university. In an attempt to make students' pathways clearer and easier to access, the partnership offers bachelor's degree programs at discounted tuition rates on MCCC's campus.

President Stout points out that this partnership goes beyond MCCC providing space for Drexel classes: "This is about Drexel working side-by-side with us...going into high schools as a team and working with students beginning in the eighth and ninth grades so that they are aware that if they want a bachelor's degree, they can get a Drexel degree, especially in STEM areas."

"It has to be an echo system of interventions. To really move the needle on college readiness we need to step out and be better at engaging our community," President Stout said. She sees this as a mutual engagement with input and involvement from the community helping the college to improve its services, particularly for small populations that she considers critically important.

This belief inspired MCCC to reach out to faith-based and community organizations as potential sources of mentors to help scale its successful Minority Male Mentoring Program (MMMP). It currently serves 19 percent of the eligible student population. College staff volunteers have mentored 500 MMMP students since 2009, which has resulted in the mentored students persisting to the next semester at a higher rate than those students who were eligible, but did not participate (77 percent over the last 5 years compared to 62 percent respectively).

Leadership

Small-scale, targeted interventions, such as Gateway to College or MMMP, demonstrate President Stout and the college boards' dedication to ensuring all students get the unique support they need to succeed. President Stout sees these programs as opportunities for sustainable change in "left behind and invisible" communities: "At the heart of my leadership is this really unrelenting kind of commitment to equity. That is why these small, targeted programs are important to me."

President Stout's capacity to concentrate on small projects, as she did with the planning of the MMMP, to sustain whole-college success strategies, and to translate these experiences for national-level conversations about community college reforms, has extended her leadership beyond Eastern Pennsylvania.

She serves as chair of the President's Advisory Board to the Community College Research Center at Columbia University Teacher's College, co-chair of the American Association of Community College's (AACC) 21st-Century Initiative Steering Committee, and member of the AACC's Board of Directors, and as a commissioner with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

As one of 11 community college presidents invited to the recent White House Summit on College Access, President Stout committed to three specific initiatives that build on MCCC's Achieving the Dream work to improve access for low-income and disadvantaged students.

"My involvement in national conversations is important to align the broad policy agenda with local realities. I believe it is important to lead national reform work the local work – college-by-college, reform-by-reform – shaping the national conversation rather than letting the national conversation solely drive changes at our colleges," President Stout said.

Through its Achieving the Dream efforts, MCCC has developed a college-wide culture that uses data to identify student needs, create innovations, and guide effective practices.

Bunker Hill Community College,
Boston, Massachusetts • Pam Y. Eddinger, President
www.bhcc.mass.edu

Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) also receives the 2014 Leah Meyer Austin Award for building whole-college solutions to increase student success and achieve equity outcomes. The commitment of faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees to Achieving the Dream's Student-Centered Model of Institutional Improvement made it possible for BHCC to sustain momentum on ambitious student success goals even as its enrollment grew from 8,000 to 14,000 students and the college transitioned to a new president.



The Helmsley Charitable Trust

The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust aspires to improve lives by supporting effective nonprofits in health, place-based initiatives, and education and human services. Since 2008, when the Trust began its active grantmaking, it has committed more than \$1 billion to a wide range of charitable organizations. Through its National Education Program, the Trust views education as a lever to advance both American economic competitiveness and individual social mobility. In K-12, the Trust focuses on ensuring all students graduate high school prepared for college or careers by supporting teacher effectiveness and the adoption and implementation of high academic standards. In postsecondary education, the Trust is primarily interested in increasing the number of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) graduates who can participate in high growth sectors of the economy. The Trust also focuses on policy levers that improve postsecondary completion, particularly for underrepresented populations. For more information, please visit www.helmsleytrust.org.



Achieving the Dream, Inc.

Achieving the Dream, Inc. is a national nonprofit dedicated to helping more community college students, particularly low-income students and students of color, stay in school and earn a college certificate or degree. Evidence-based, student-centered, and built on the values of equity and excellence, Achieving the Dream is closing achievement gaps and accelerating student success nationwide by 1) guiding evidence-based institutional improvement, 2) leading policy change, 3) generating knowledge, and 4) engaging the public. Conceived as an initiative in 2004 by Lumina Foundation and seven founding partner organizations, today Achieving the Dream is leading the most comprehensive non-governmental reform network for student success in higher education history. With over 200 colleges, more than 100 coaches and advisors, and 15 state policy teams—working throughout 34 states and the District of Columbia—the Achieving the Dream National Reform Network helps 3.8 million community college students have a better chance of realizing greater economic opportunity and achieving their dreams.

Applications for the 2014 Leah Meyer Austin Award were reviewed by a selection committee representing Achieving the Dream Founding Partners. The winning college had to present strong quantitative data and outcomes across all five Achieving the Dream outcome indicators. In addition, the college had to show evidence of closing achievement gaps, as well as a compelling qualitative story of culture change using Achieving the Dream's Student-Centered Model for Institutional Improvement. The selection committee was supported by the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT).