DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

Early Interventions Reduce Developmental Education Enrollments: El Paso Community College, El Paso, Texas

From ATD’s Field Guide for Improving Student Success

Of the nearly 10,000 first-time college students who took college placement tests at El Paso Community College (EPCC) in 2003–04, 98 percent needed at least one developmental course and 38 percent needed developmental courses in three subjects — math, reading, and writing. In other words, nearly all students were beginning college with a sense that they were at a disadvantage.

EPCC research showed a surprising reason high school students were not placing into college-level courses: a lack of understanding of the importance of, and reasons for, placement exams. Students were not prepared to demonstrate the full extent of their preparation. Upon joining the Achieving the Dream effort, EPCC launched the College Readiness Initiative to ensure more high school graduates would place into the coursework for which they were truly prepared. This step furthered local collaborative efforts already underway. EPCC is now working with local school districts and the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) to realign K–16 curricula and share effective instructional practice and student performance data. Students take placement tests in high school and receive interventions before they graduate. Students and parents are also offered a comprehensive orientation that explains why placement tests are required and what the scores mean. The effort has had measurable and sustained results. EPCC has seen:

- An increase in the number of students placing directly into college-level certificate and degree-applicable courses
- A reduction in the number of students requiring developmental education coursework upon entering college, with a 24 percent decrease in developmental reading enrollments and a 37 percent decrease in developmental writing enrollments between spring 2006 and spring 2008

In addition, because of Achieving the Dream’s emphasis on evidence-driven decision-making, EPCC and UTEP have created a data-sharing system that uses a single student identifier, allowing longitudinal tracking of students from local high schools through either or both institutions. Outcomes are shared with faculty, counselors, administrators, and others from all institutions involved. This tracking has enabled EPCC to confer associate degrees, even after students have transferred to UTEP, when the required hours are completed. In the past, students often had enough hours to earn a degree, but never actually received a diploma. Now, they are sent a letter of congratulations from EPCC and an invitation to attend commencement.