



**Office of the President**

September 25, 2019

**Re: Letter Requesting Continuation as an ATD Leader College**

This is to request that Achieving the Dream continue to confer Leader College recognition on Danville Area Community College. Since becoming an ATD institution in 2009, DACC has steadily improved student success directly as a result of operationalizing ATD strategies.

A decade of success has helped rally DACC's faculty and staff into becoming true believers in the ATD model. The community that DACC serves has been a quintessential proving ground for ATD. Less than a mile separates the serene DACC campus from what has become a socioeconomic gulag for more than 5,000 people, a Section 8 housing complex called Fair Oaks. This 1,500-unit tenement is beset with crime, gang activity, and urban blight. The residents, who are predominantly African-American, had fled from Chicago's notorious Cabrini Green section to seek improved living conditions in Danville, only to encounter in the Fair Oaks as nightmarish an existence as the one they left in Chicago.

Since becoming an Achieving the Dream institution in 2009, DACC has benefited from the support of ATD coaches in helping foster a College-wide commitment to the ideals espoused in the "seven capacity areas." One of the first accomplishments for the ATD Equity and Inclusion Sub-team was to implement a "Framework for Understanding Poverty" across all academic curricula. The College subsequently reached out directly to Fair Oaks residents by providing an on-site class titled "Getting Ahead," which would help participants envision a pragmatic plan for achieving their personal life goals. Some sought well-paying jobs, others yearned to earn high-school equivalency or a college degree or a trade certification. Most faced obstacles such as food insecurity, the need for childcare, and myriad other challenges.

Carla Boyd, who in 2017 became DACC's chief diversity officer, has been the architect and lead teacher for the "Getting Ahead" course. The initiative has flourished as a result of a partnership with the Housing Authority of Danville's staff, consistent with ATD's "Engagement & Communication" capacity. In September 2017, Ms. Boyd was joined by Vermilion County Board Chair Mike Marron, and Fair Oaks resident Norman Anglin to present the ATD program before a national audience in St. Louis for Ruby Payne's Aha! Process, Bridges Out of Poverty Institute.

DACC has improved three major student-performance metrics since embracing ATD principles. With regard to completion for both part-time and full-time students, the graduation rate was a little over 24 percent in 2008. Since becoming an ATD institution, the rate rose by more than 16 percent over the next nine years.

Concomitant to completion is student retention. Over the past four years, student retention of the overall student population has steadily increased, from just over 41 percent to more than 47 percent. The College expects the fall-to-fall retention rate to increase to more than 50 percent during the next academic year.

Persistence among DACC students has also grown steadily. Full-time student persistence has increased 38 percent during the 2011-12 academic year to 52 percent in the past year. Part-time student persistence has also risen, from 17 percent to 27 percent in the same time frame.

Consistent with strategies emerging from ATD Committees and in consultation with ATD coaches, DACC can point to a number of successful programs that have resulted in improved student-success metrics. One way of these is an initiative called "Operation Graduation." Director of Admissions and Records Timothy Morgan tracks all first-time, full-time fall-semester students to ensure that they are on target to achieve their graduation goals. To get new fall students off on the right foot, the Counseling and Advisement office engages in "intrusive intervention," which involves regular contact with this cohort of students throughout a semester and prior to registering for the next semester's classes. For students who are experiencing difficulty with their studies or are facing struggles in their life, advisers "intrude" where possible, providing help that has ranged from tutoring for a difficult class to financial and social-service support either through the College Foundation or the College-managed American Job Center.

Two other successful programs are the Mandatory Advisement project and the "How Close Are You?" initiative. The former ensures that part-time students as well as full-time students are on track toward achieving their goals. The program requires new, part-time students to meet with an advisor to create an academic plan before their first semester at DACC. The latter program identifies both current and former students who have completed a significant number of credits toward achieving a degree and yet have not achieved their academic goals. DACC advisers contact these students to develop action plans to help these students achieve their original or revised goals.

By renewing DACC's designation as a Leader College, ATD will keep this positive momentum going and more deeply infuse the ATD philosophy, mission, and strategies into the DACC way of life. If you would like more information from me about why DACC students would benefit from our continuing as an ATD Leader college, please feel free to contact me directly at 217-443-8848.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Dr. Stephen Nacco  
President  
Danville Area Community College