



August 22, 2012

James Henry Russell, President
Texarkana College
2500 N. Robison
Texarkana, TX 75599

Dear President Russell,

Thank you for your Achieving the Dream efforts this year and for submitting your annual report. We reviewed your annual report and consulted with your Leadership Coach and Data Coach. We offer our observations regarding the college's progress to date.

We are proud of your ongoing use of data in making institutional decisions and the complete transparency with which you share this information internally and externally. You have done an extraordinary job of returning the college to a sound financial footing and the collaborative way in which this has been done is truly inspirational.

We are also encouraged by your progress in implementing the Achieving the Dream model in the following ways:

Committed Leadership: Your team approach to leadership sets a great example for all colleges and it is particularly encouraging to see the faculty leadership step up and take such an active role in shaping institutional direction. The commitment to enhancing student success during this difficult period speaks volumes to your institutional priorities and commitment.

Use of Evidence to Improve Policies, Programs, and Services: The transformation in your use of data, President Russell, and the exceptional job done by Jamie Ashby to create an effective and practical Institutional Research Office are key improvements at the college this past year. There is strong evidence that data are utilized to shape policy and practice and to improve programs and services.

Broad Engagement: The efforts by the college during the past year to fully engage all segments of the college community and to more broadly engage the external community deserve the greatest admiration of our Achieving the Dream community.

Systemic Institutional Improvement: The complete change in administration and the development of a comprehensive data management system are strong indicators of lasting systemic change.

We recognize that improving student outcomes can be both rewarding and challenging. As you plan for the coming year, we encourage you to take a closer look at the following:

Committed Leadership: Assuming that the college is successful in expanding its formal taxing district, a natural result will be the need to involve new leadership at the board and community support level. We strongly recommend a formal community education program to bring new constituents up to speed on the college's student achievement goals and strategies.

Use of Evidence to Improve Policies, Programs, and Services: The improvements in your use of data during this past year have been dramatic, but there is still work to be done in re-establishing a formal program evaluation system for all academic and support areas.

Broad Engagement: The one missing element in the report in terms of broad engagement is the student element. The college would benefit from more actively and regularly soliciting the voices and opinions of students concerning how they can most effectively be served.

Systemic Institutional Improvement: The college's systemic institutional improvements have been profound. The challenge will be to sustain those improvements when practices become routine rather than in response to crisis.

Other recommendations: The progress being made in introducing active and collaborative learning strategies is very admirable for a first year. We think you might learn a great deal from Patrick Henry Community College about the challenges of accurately assessing the effects of new teaching strategies when they are being introduced at scale and how to anticipate these challenges.

As you know, the past year has been an important and critical time for community colleges. There is much that is expected of us and much that we need to accomplish if we are to create clear and meaningful pathways for our students as they strive toward success. It is our belief that working together, as a community of learners, practitioners and citizens, we can set high standards and accomplish these goals.

We appreciate the time, resources and hard work that you and your faculty and staff have devoted to your Achieving the Dream efforts. We look forward to working with you in the coming year and seeing you at DREAM 2013.

Sincerely,



Rachel Singer
Vice President for Community College Relations and Applied Research
Achieving the Dream

cc: Kent Farnsworth, Leadership Coach
Jan Lyddon, Data Coach
Jamie Ashby, Director Institutional Research & Effectiveness
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