



Dr. Hector Gonzales
President
Southwest Texas Junior College
2401 Garner Field Rd
Uvalde, TX 78801

Dear Dr. Gonzales:

We are thrilled to have Southwest Texas Junior College (SWTJC) as part of the Achieving the Dream (ATD) National Reform Network, and are deeply appreciative of you and your colleagues' continued commitment to student success and equity. After reviewing your 2014 Annual Reflection and receiving input from your ATD coaching team, we offer several observations in this letter about your institution's progress to date. We have arranged the review using the five broad principles that ATD views as key to institutional transformation, which also serve as the section topics for your Principles Assessment Survey. This feedback is offered in support of your institution in its efforts to achieve the student success and equity goals identified by your team.

Reflections on the Five Achieving the Dream Principles

Committed Leadership

ATD applauds you and your leadership team's consistent and steady support for improving student success, creating a culture of evidence, and decreasing achievement gaps. Your team has successfully reorganized the college to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Examples of this include appointing quality replacements for retiring staff as well as key changes to organizations and personnel, leading to demonstrated continuance in improving student success.

We encourage SWTJC to continue to expand the scope of the Student Success Centers to include support for gateway courses in the face of declining enrollments and state funding; to broaden faculty participation in the Student Success Centers, especially faculty who teach gateway courses; and to increase the number of faculty and staff who analyze and use student success data to make needed improvements.

Use of Evidence to Improve Policies, Programs, and Services

SWTJC effectively uses evidence to improve policies, programs and services. To support this effort, we suggest refining your data to measure outcomes that can then be used to improve courses and programs and suggest continuing to train and encourage additional faculty and staff to use data to improve courses and programs in ongoing institutional effectiveness activities. SWTJC may greatly benefit from strengthening its IT and IR departments as well as broadening its training for faculty and staff, especially gateway faculty, in the use of data to improve student success.

Broad Engagement

ATD admires how engagement minded you and the SWTJC leadership team are. You set a wonderful example for other colleges with your lunchtime town-hall type meetings at all of your major college locations which include faculty, staff, students and community representation. These town hall meetings couple well with your regular efforts to engage faculty, staff, and students on the main campus which allows you to hear directly from these constituencies. These face-to-face opportunities afford greater communication channels to articulate SWTJC's student success agenda, goals, data and activities. SWTJC is making good strides in identifying causes of achievement gaps and informing the development of strategies for improving student success as well as planning for greater alignment between instructional and student services.

Systemic Institutional Improvement

SWTJC has made progress with systemic institutional improvement efforts with the addition of dedicated-intrusive advising to identify problems earlier, to help students select appropriate courses, and to improve student success. More institutional improvement effort is evidenced by the addition of the full-time Professional Development Officer and the Director of Student Engagement to improve leadership and coordination.

We suggest expanding the new advising system beyond entering-developmental students to the entire student body and using the new offices to encourage and facilitate changes in instructional delivery and student services that are conducive to improving student success. SWTJC may greatly benefit from ensuring that all SWTJC students are provided with dedicated-intrusive advising from entry to graduation or transfer. To further support institutional improvement, SWTJC may wish to update the information in the New Faculty Orientation Guide with current information on the college and the new role of the Professional Development Officer.

Equity

SWTJC has a wonderful climate of respect for inclusiveness. This is supported by adjunct and full-time faculty, staff (including front-line and student support services), and administrators who have experience or knowledge of how to work with students from diverse backgrounds and are sensitive to the unique needs of culturally diverse students. We are delighted that SWTJC routinely creates opportunities for all students, especially those who have traditionally faced the most significant barriers to achievement, to voice opinions about their college experience in order to identify and implement changes in policies and activities to address achievement gaps.

Final Thoughts

We would like to remind you to submit your interventions to the Interventions Showcase so that the rest of the ATD community can benefit from your sharing of the results of your hard work to promote student success and improve student outcomes. Please do so at your earliest convenience.

As we reflect on all of your work leading up to and in the past year, we are most impressed by you and your administrative team's leadership and commitment and SWTJC's comprehensive data system.

We recognize that the distinct environment of each college poses unique challenges and opportunities. In terms of next steps, we would like to suggest that the college integrate the student success agenda with new organization and personnel changes, broaden faculty and student involvement and communication, and increase the focus on improving success in gateway courses and closing achievement gaps with various student cohorts and across all campuses.

We appreciate the hard work, time, and resources that your institution devotes to your Achieving the Dream efforts. We encourage you to discuss the feedback in this letter with your Leadership Coach and Data Coach, who are ready to support and guide you moving forward. Please consider reviewing this letter with your ATD Core Team and college at large if you so wish. It may assist you in shaping the direction of your ongoing student success efforts. We look forward to working with you in the coming year and welcome your questions and comments along the way.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carol A. Lincoln".

Carol A. Lincoln
Senior Vice President