



# Achieving the Dream™

Community Colleges Count

August 23, 2012

Steven C. Ender, President  
Grand Rapids Community College  
143 Bostwick Ave. NE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503-3295

Dear President Ender,

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 enthusiastic about your achievements regarding the acquisition of Blackboard Analytics Data Summit. We are also pleased that in order to concentrate efforts on improving student success, the new leadership team is making improvements in the collection and analysis of data evidence of faculty interest in reading, English, and math reform.

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

**Committed Leadership:** *We are impressed with the strong commitment expressed by the president and board members. The recent decision to purchase a Blackboard Analytics data warehouse through Title III funding is encouraging. It is likely that this will greatly increase the college's capacity to use data for making institutional improvement as well as day-to-day decision-making. We are pleased with the serious course reform efforts led by key faculty in English, reading, and math. Further, we are optimistic about the re-configuration of the Core Team into a permanent college success council.*

**Use of Evidence to Improve Policies, Programs, and Services:** *We are encouraged that you have plans to upgrade your IT and IR functions. The data warehouse has the potential to make data accessible to key stakeholders on the campus. This upgraded IT and IR infrastructure will also assist the college with longitudinal cohort tracking and increase the college's ability to disaggregate data to look more deeply at problems and to identify where interventions are needed. We applaud the addition of an emphasis on data collection and analysis about African American male students. The sophistication and helpfulness of institutional research leadership is impressive. We fully support the decision to develop a stronger assessment plan and professional development plan based upon longitudinal data on student success.*

**Broad Engagement:** *We endorse the college's decision to expand faculty engagement on the Core Team and for including faculty in the data summit development. We have observed that broad-base engagement of stakeholders, especially faculty, is essential to successful*

implementation of the Achieving the Dream interventions and other related student success work. We are pleased to hear about the success of the large leadership and faculty workshop held in spring 2012, to increase a consistent understanding of Achieving the Dream.

Systemic Institutional Improvement: It was impressive to note that Grand Rapids Community College has already aligned the Achieving the Dream interventions with the accreditation, planning and program review processes. By institutionalizing the work, the college can ensure greater buy-in and sustainability of the interventions and changes in practices. We are impressed with the excellent monitoring report that you have developed and shared with the Board and the college. Lastly, we commend the inclusion of student success "ends" and new dashboard emphasis.

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: We encourage GRCC to continue to build upon the leadership support by identifying roles for student affairs administrators and mid-level instructional leaders. This will help strengthen the college's capacity to implement the student success agenda in all levels of the institution. We recognize the need for strong leadership at the deans/department levels for student success initiatives and gap analysis/remedies. We suggest that you consider adding faculty union representation on the key Achieving the Dream teams.

Use of Evidence to Improve Policies, Programs, and Services: We encourage the college to continue to enhance its research capacity. Examine ways to educate college personnel to use data to inform decision-making and improve programs. We also encourage the college to take advantage of resources and data tools available through Achieving the Dream, Inc. We recognize the continuing need for good, accessible analytical systems. In some cases, student outcome measures and goals need to be clarified so that they can be measured. We feel it would be helpful to analyze student data annually to determine new and changing gaps. We recommend creating evaluation methods for key strategies like Reading Apprenticeship.

Broad Engagement: Since the college has already aligned its Achieving the Dream work with accreditation, planning, and program review, we recommend that the college build an engagement plan around stakeholder participation in these on-going activities. This will require considerable support from the senior leadership team and faculty leaders. Further, we suggest that the college explore ways to engage adjunct faculty and students at a meaningful level in the student success efforts at the college. We also think it is critical to find and include key African American faculty leadership in the initiatives.

Systemic Institutional Improvement: We feel that a professional development plan to complement student success initiatives would bring a sense of common purpose to the college. We recommend that you continue to build the IR and IT infrastructure. Other colleges have found it helpful to examine ways to attract additional external resources such, as the Title III program, to further advance their students success agenda.

Other recommendations: The year of planning and now a first year of implementation of Achieving the Dream-based improvement initiatives has gone well. A growing enthusiasm for the work is apparent. We look forward to seeing what will happen as you broaden and deepen

*faculty and student development staff engagement and as you find additional leadership among faculty for the plans to better meet the needs of your growing African American population.*

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: Alice Villadsen, Leadership Coach  
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