

RESEARCH NOTE

**ATD Peer Institution Best Practice:
Data Democratization at Pierce College**

This Research Note highlights a best practice by a fellow Achieving the Dream (ATD) institution, Pierce College, which has made significant gains in moving the needle for student success and provides recommendations for implementation at NOVA. Pierce College District located in Lakewood and Puyallup, Washington, is an Achieving the Dream Leader College of Distinction, the 2017 recipient of ATD's Leah Meyer Austin Award, and the recipient of the Aspen Prize "Rising Star" designation to note that Pierce College is a 2019, "Top 5 Community College in the Nation."

Identifying the Barriers to Student Success

Pierce College joined the ATD Network in 2012 and began the self-exploratory process of determining barriers that were impeding their students' progress towards completion. In the process of redesigning their pre-college math pathway, Pierce College discovered significant **grading discrepancies** which impacted their course and college completion rates. Utilizing data dashboards created by the college's institutional research office, frontline faculty were able to easily access and interpret data on how well their students were doing. In addition, faculty could determine **gaps in success rates** between student demographics as well as success rates of their students in subsequent classes.

Data Democratization

Data democratization means that all frontline faculty have access to student data and outcomes without barriers to expedite the informed decision-making process. Since establishing the data dashboards, Pierce College has successfully given the data to faculty who can then focus on better understanding their students' needs and eliminating barriers to student success, all while collaborating with colleagues to compare best teaching and classroom practices. The Pierce College model took a few years to build but with the support of faculty eager to dive deeper into the data and connect with their colleagues, the relationships and shared experiences have continued to grow.

In 2017, The Chronicle of Higher Education reported on the success of the Pierce College data dashboards and indicated that more than 95 percent of full-time instructors are accessing the data dashboards. Pierce College instructors and administrators discuss their findings and their encouragement for use and expansion of the data dashboards and process for involving faculty in

improving student persistence at the college. These efforts by Pierce College faculty have created a college-wide involvement for moving the needle of student success beginning with teaching and learning.¹

How Will NOVA Benefit?

NOVA looks to expand its ATD Institutional Capacities of Teaching and Learning, Equity, and Data and Technology to better support our student-focused culture.² Utilizing Pierce College's data dashboard model will allow NOVA to democratize course completion data. Providing student- and faculty-level data directly to faculty will help to increase informed decision-making capabilities and increase sustainable action toward improving student success at NOVA.

It is imperative to provide student and course level data to the faculty who can immediately utilize the information to improve classroom and course outcomes. The goals of ATD at NOVA are to improve student success metrics by utilizing college-wide input to select and implement high-impact practices that improve student success. Developing a data dashboard system would empower faculty to use the information they have gained to provide input for best practices for student success all while prioritizing students' best interests.

Recommendations for Introduction and Implementation of Data Dashboards at NOVA:

1. **Intentionally Designed Leadership Model:** The ATD team can unite with the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) at NOVA to provide leadership and communication about the empowerment of data dashboards and provide training for interpreting and utilizing data.
2. **College-wide Student Success Outcomes:** Address current and detailed outcomes of student success and how all college stakeholders play a vital role in student success.
3. **Support for Grassroots Ownership:** Allow early adopters of the data dashboards to share their experiences with colleagues. Leadership should create opportunities for engagement and connection to discuss best practices and ownership.
4. **Support a Culture of Evidence in a Positive Data Environment:** Create professional development opportunities for faculty to ask questions, experiment with data, learn how to interpret data, learn the discourse around data democratization: "Data for the frontline: who, how, what, and why."
5. **Provide Examples of Inequitable Circumstances:** Identify how small pedagogical or classroom management changes have had major impacts on course completion.
6. **Provide Professional Development Funding to Faculty:** Provide opportunities to faculty to design course experiments utilizing the data dashboards to refine their course work, classroom management, or course resources, etc.

¹ The Chronicle of Higher Education: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/getting-faculty-members-to/241323>

² ATD Institutional Capacity Framework: <https://www.achievingthedream.org/our-network/our-approach>