1. Achieving the Dream (ATD) Initiative: Basics
   - The major focus of the ATD Initiative is on improving student success in community college. The ATD Initiative specifically works to increase the number of students who successfully complete the courses they take; advance from developmental to credit-level courses; enroll in and successfully complete gatekeeper courses; continue to enroll from one semester to the next; and earn degrees and/or certificates.¹
   - Decisions for policy and implementation changes in community colleges are data-driven. That is, participating schools will “use rich student data systems in decision making and place high priority on improving student outcomes.”²
   - Student outcome data drives and shapes the use of ATD interventions, and the results of these interventions are used to benchmark and measure student success at the College level.

2. Areas of Focus
   - Course Completion – Successful course completion is defined as receiving a grade of C or higher in a course (or S in a developmental course).
   - Developmental Courses – Students often enter community college underprepared for college-level courses, specifically in math and English. After taking a placement test, some entering students place at developmental levels in math, writing, and/or reading. These courses must be successfully completed before entering college-level courses in

¹ From ATD Goals: http://www.achievingthedream.org/
² From ATD Expected Outcomes: http://www.achievingthedream.org/
these subject areas. Many students struggle to successfully complete developmental courses.

- **Gatekeeper Courses** – Gatekeeper courses are defined as those that are critical to future success in college, such as general education or prerequisite courses, which have high enrollment and low success rates. Five courses are designated as gatekeeper courses at NOVA. These courses are ACC 211: Principles of Accounting I, ENG 111: College Composition I, BIO 101: General Biology I, MTH 151: Mathematics for the Liberal Arts I, and MTH 163: Pre-calculus I.

- **Retention** – Retention rates are measured by the percentage of students enrolled in a certain semester who return in a subsequent semester (e.g., fall-to-spring retention, fall-to-fall retention, fall-to-following-spring retention).

- **Graduation** – The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) defines graduation rate as “the number completing their program within 150 percent of normal time to completion.” Programs at NOVA include Associate of Arts (A.A.), Associate of Science (A.S.), Applied Associate of Arts (A.A.A.), Applied Associate of Science (A.A.S.), and Certificate programs.

3. **Current Interventions**

- **First Year Experience (FYE) Program** – The FYE program at NOVA is an overarching initiative developed to assist students with making good choices. The program includes specific courses (Student Development (SDV) 100), programs (NSO, SOAR), and activities (career and transfer fairs, workshops, etc.) to help new students: build meaningful relationships with faculty, staff and other students, transition smoothly into college and navigate, and prepare students for academic, career, and personal success at NOVA and beyond. The first components of FYE were implemented in Fall 2010. At present, the program includes a New Student Orientation (NSO)/ Student Orientation Advising and Registration (SOAR), a specialized student development course (FYE SDV 100) developed specifically for first-time students, a new student convocation developed to welcome and initiate students into college life, peer mentoring and student activities for first-time to college students.

- **New Student Orientation (NSO)** – In Summer 2008, NOVA piloted components of the New Student Orientation. During Summer 2009, NSO was standardized across five campuses. Based on data from the previous summers, NSO was revised for Summer 2010. The orientation is now provided in two parts: (1) At the beginning of the summer,
Student Orientation Advising and Registration (SOAR) provides information about financial aid, degree requirements, programs of study, and scheduling options. SOAR provides new students with first-semester advising and the opportunity to register for courses; (2) At the end of the summer, NSO focuses on student engagement, providing students with the opportunity to meet campus provosts, faculty and other students and to learn about student activities. Prior to both the fall and spring semesters, orientations are conducted for new students on five NOVA campuses. Approximately 3,000 students participate in these orientations each semester.

- **Student Development (SDV) 100** – SDV 100 is NOVA’s student success course. This course covers study skills, time-management, decision-making, and the development of a college and career success plan. Developing these skills is an important part of student success. The revised SDV 100 course, which encompasses these components, was introduced in Fall 2009.

- **Learning Communities** – Learning Communities offer Developmental and ESL students the opportunity to take paired courses during the semester with the same group of classmates. This group dynamic not only offers students peer-to-peer support, but also creates lasting friendships within a more personalized instructional setting. Instructors teaching different subjects share lesson plans and combine assignments as a way to increase learning comprehension. In Fall 2010, developmental English learning communities with ENG 3 (Preparations for Writing II) or ENG 5 (Reading Improvement II) as base courses were piloted. NOVA’s developmental English learning communities typically pair ENG 3 and ENG 5 or one of these two developmental courses with a credit course.

- **Developmental Math Redesign** – NOVA has redesigned developmental mathematics. Based on a plan presented by a task force comprised of developmental math faculty and supported in part by a National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT) Changing the Equation grant, the redesign uses a modified Emporium Model which provides interactive computer software combined with personalized, on-demand assistance and mandatory student lab participation. All three developmental mathematics courses (MTH 2, Arithmetic; MTH 3, Algebra I; and MTH 4, Algebra II) have been replaced with one unified course, MTT 4, Developmental Mathematics Technology-Based. This self-paced course requires that students show mastery to move from one unit to the next. The redesigned MTT 4 consists of 10 units, each with a pre-test and post-test. Students may move to the next unit when they pass the post-test.
• **Developmental English Redesign** – Developmental English courses at NOVA are currently being redesigned in collaboration with the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) redesign team to better serve the students who place in these courses. The redesigned courses will pilot within the next two years.

4. **Student Success Coordinator positions** – In order to implement the variety of ATD initiatives on each NOVA campus, a coordinator position has been created for each campus. The Student Success Coordinator at each campus works to consistently implement ATD student success initiatives at their campus.

5. **Recommendations for Policy/Implementation Changes** – Based on 3-year evaluations of ATD initiatives, the following recommendations have been made by the ATD Core Team at NOVA: 1- mandate NSO for first-time students, 2- mandate placement testing for first-time students, 3- mandate enrollment in developmental courses during first semester (if placed), 4- enforce current policy on SDV enrollment within first year for first-time students, 5- eliminate late registration, and 6- mandate early advising for first-time students.

6. **ATD National Scene**

• Leader College Status – NOVA was given the title ATD Leader College in 2010. “Achieving the Dream institutions that have met high standards of practice and performance are recognized as ‘Achieving the Dream Leader Colleges.’ Achieving the Dream Leader Colleges have demonstrated commitment to and made progress on the four principles of Achieving the Dream: committed leadership, use of evidence to improve programs and services, broad engagement, and systemic institutional improvement. They have also shown three years of sustained student success improvement.”

• ATD National Institute Presentations – NOVA was accepted to give multiple presentations at the ATD Annual Meeting on Student Success in 2012.

7. **College-wide Activities**

• Reading Common Text Across Campuses

---

4 From CC Strategies: Leader Colleges: http://www.achievingthedream.org/
Dr. Kathleen Gabriel, author of *Teaching Unprepared Students: Strategies for Promoting Success and Retention in Higher Education* presented her work to NOVA faculty and staff in 2011.

Rebecca Cox, author of *The College Fear Factor: How Students and Professors Misunderstand One Another* presented her work to NOVA faculty and staff in 2010.

- Invited Speakers – Experts in higher education have been invited to present their work at NOVA for the benefit of the faculty and staff. Presentations have been made about the defining characteristics of the current generation of students, teaching diverse learners, and teaching unprepared students. ATD team members from El Paso Community College have shared their interventions at an ATD presentation. A workshop to aid in the development of learning communities was presented by the coordinator of learning communities at Kingsborough Community College. In addition, faculty members from Patrick Henry Community College presented a workshop to inform faculty about ways to incorporate cooperative learning in classroom teaching.

- College-wide Symposiums – A variety of symposiums are being made available for faculty and staff to increase their understanding of student success issues and practices at NOVA. Topics include Collaborative Learning, Learning Communities, and Student Engagement in the Classroom.

8. Campus Meetings and Workshops

- Meetings where members of campus teams and ATD task forces meet to discuss data, ongoing interventions, and other key issues have allowed for collaboration across divisions, disciplines and campuses. Additionally, each campus ATD team sponsors workshops, brown-bag meetings, campus forums and town hall meetings. These activities have included discussions of data, college-wide interventions, engagement of students, innovations in technology, and advising. Faculty members are encouraged to both attend and make presentations. At some campuses, special events and mentoring sessions for adjunct teachers have been sponsored by campus teams.

- Numerous presentations concerning ATD interventions have been made at NOVA’s Power Up Your Pedagogy Conference. In Spring 2011, ATD sponsored an innovative all faculty and staff symposium. Focusing on the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) data, NOVA faculty and staff shared strategies to engage students in the first few weeks of class. Taken together, these events and presentations have sparked
valuable conversations and led to greater faculty and staff engagement in the ATD initiative.

9. Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Partnership
   - NOVA’s ATD initiative has been represented on committees involved in the development of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), a component of the SACS accreditation. The ATD QEP proposal for early academic advising was incorporated into the final QEP: *GPS for Success: Teaching and Learning Through Advising*. ATD has presented a strong voice at the college for the development of a coherent and comprehensive framework for student support.

10. Internal and External Presentations
    - The math redesign team work together to present their findings to groups outside of NOVA at higher education conferences as well as inviting NOVA faculty, staff, and external stakeholders to participate in presentations at NOVA.
    - College ATD members give presentations at National conferences. At the 2012 conference called D.R.E.A.M. (Data. Reform. Equity. Achievement. Movement.), the following papers were presented: 1- the role of the Office of Institutional Research in effecting change at community colleges; 2- the development and evaluation of NOVA’s New Student Orientation and revised SDV 100 course; and 3- the partnering of the VCCS and Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to reduce the need for developmental education in Virginia.