

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis, and Higher Education Sub-Committee,

My name is Erin Ortega, and I am currently coordinating the college transition program, REACT (Reaching Educational Achievement for College Transition.) The partnership between Manchester Adult Education and Manchester Community College has created a solid foundation for remedial programming, and has created new and distinctive opportunities for a population of disenfranchised students. By merging the expertise of the Adult Education and the Community College systems, students are given a second chance at a positive educational experience. This experience has given them the necessary skillset to be successful in college and career; there is now an expectation that they can change their lives, and they are finally empowered to do so.

REACT has quickly become widely recognized across campus and the community and has become the educational outlet for a multicultural, demographically diverse population of learners. In addition, these students bring a wealth of life experiences to the table but have struggled in the educational arena for a variety of reasons. This partnership has also led to students having access to more channels of support. As we move forward, we must continue to utilize the unique strengths of both adult education and the community college, to effectively develop a program that has a dynamic structure of supports to help students transition into credit-bearing courses confidently and smoothly.

REACT is designed to serve three types of students: students testing into the lowest level of remedial courses, students lacking the social and emotional skills needed for success in community college, and English Language Learners who desire to transition into community college. Through REACT, students experience holistic student development and comprehensive student services. By serving the whole student, we are able to offer wrap-around services, foster a deeper sense of community among staff and students, and help students change their perceptions about themselves.

We have begun to develop a program that encompasses social services, disability services, transportation training, academic skill-building, 21st –century skill development, career-pathway exploration, and financial planning. We are in the process of designing workshops and additional activities. The goal is to offer students a full program incorporating all of these crucial aspects without taking away from their time in their academic classes. Their academic classes include English, Math, and First-Year Experience. The development of a program of this nature will take a significant amount of time to come to full fruition, as it is not a traditional program serving traditional students. Many of our students do not have the requisite skills to finish school in the traditional 2 to 4 year timeframe. Instead, these students come with complexities that require time, time for academic skill development, socialization practice, and professional and career exploration.

In our state, 70.6 percent of college freshmen at two-year schools are enrolling in remedial courses in their first year, and zero are completing gateway courses within two academic years (data provided by the State of CT to Complete College America in 2013 <http://completecollege.org/state-data-loader/?state=Connecticut>). This makes it abundantly clear that we must continue to immerse ourselves in this body of work to ensure success for students in developmental education.

Best Regards,
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