

## Student Retention Program

### Introduction

Opening the door to higher education means opening the door to a better future for all Dallas County Community College District students. That process starts with recruiting our students, but their continued success depends on following through — once they walk through DCCCD's doors — and ensuring that they receive the instruction, services, guidance and support they need to succeed and complete their education here.

Those key components to student success are the key components of retention as well. When we successfully retain, teach and assist our students, they then can move forward and achieve their educational goals.

Every member of the DCCCD family opens that door to education and helps retain our students — faculty, staff and administrators. We each have a role to play in student retention and success.

With that fact in mind, a new retention plan for the district now serves as a blueprint to retain students; it focuses initially on first-time-in-college students and those who are enrolled in developmental mathematics.

In order to implement that plan and to ensure that every college, location and employee becomes engaged in retention efforts, DCCCD is offering funds that can be used for retention programs and projects; has identified phases that we will use to build our new retention program; and encourages collaboration and cooperation among institutions so that we put our students' needs and interests first, which will help them stay on course and stay in school at our DCCCD colleges.

### Retention: Sustaining Students

While recruitment enables us to move students *into* our colleges at DCCCD, that effort represents only the first step toward helping students succeed. Moving them *through* our colleges is critical as well so that they can become productive citizens, achieve their personal goals, support their families and contribute to their communities.

Helping students stay in college is the goal of student retention. That process happens over a period of time as we work together to keep our students enrolled from one semester to the next and from one year to the next until they reach their academic goals. That means providing them with consistent advising; career and personal counseling; quality academic instruction; responsive student services; auxiliary services; and good customer service. These components comprise the key ingredients that retain students and provide the structure they need to move from one semester to the next and eventually graduate, transfer and complete their education or start new careers.

Every aspect and component of the district's retention program will involve implementing practices that can be replicated among our colleges; that are sustainable and can be scaled to fit students' needs; and that are collaborative — meaning that two or more colleges are involved.

*More information on DCCCD retention "best practices" is available at [www.dcccd.edu/Retention](http://www.dcccd.edu/Retention)*

Additionally, retention plans should be innovative and far-reaching — yet practical. That’s not impossible. In fact, by putting several components in place, we can achieve that goal. By designing a plan that is tiered (or implemented in phases); has results that can be measured; includes strategies that produce immediate impact; and incorporates long-term strategies as well, we can reach those goals and help our students.

### **Retention: Phasing in the Plan**

Retaining and sustaining DCCCD students calls for collaboration, cooperation and innovation — and that process won’t happen overnight. It also requires teamwork and a detailed plan which, first and foremost, anticipates and delivers what students need.

The plan for DCCCD’s retention program involves five phases: providing competitive incentive funding for several types of programs; training all college employees in successful retention practices; developing successful practices in retention that we can share with one another; developing educational initiatives and a marketing campaign that helps us all learn more about retention; and developing baseline data, a tracking system and subsequent tracking measures, data collection and other accountability measures so that we can analyze and improve on our retention efforts.

### **Retention: Applying for Funds**

DCCCD retention awards are tools that our district and colleges can use to help improve existing efforts; create new programs or replicate existing ones (and fund them); and also acquire resources for those programs. Again, the initial retention program for the district will focus on first-time-in-college students and those who are enrolled in developmental mathematics — described by the chancellor’s staff as the “most critical gatekeeper course” in terms of future student success. However, awards will not be restricted to these areas.

Research indicates that student retention occurs when institutions address several key areas: student persistence in college; case management programs (what students need and how we can help them on a case-by-case basis); instructional practices (such as learning communities, as well as collaborative assignments and projects, which engage students in the classroom); and technology that is integrated into instruction (hybrid courses and the use of course management systems, for example).

Developing early warning systems for those students who are at risk also is a critical element of successful student retention, including support systems such as tutoring, learning resource activities, one-to-one sessions about financial/adjustment issues and other related areas — all of which show students that DCCCD cares about them as a person and wants them to succeed.

Funding for retention programs will be granted in four categories: planning awards, seed awards, replication awards and resource awards. The first deadlines involve funding for seed and replication awards; initial awards will be funded for use during the spring 2009 semester.

*For descriptions of each award category, criteria and templates for applications — plus a timeline and list of deadlines, visit [www.dcccd.edu/Retention](http://www.dcccd.edu/Retention).*

Dr. Sharon Blackman, senior associate vice chancellor for educational affairs and chief retention officer, is directing our district-wide effort on student retention. If you have questions or need to contact her, call (214) 860-2410 or send an e-mail to [sblackman@dcccd.edu](mailto:sblackman@dcccd.edu).

Please read and explore the DCCCD retention Web site (<http://www.dcccd.edu/Retention>) for information as you plan your retention efforts and collaborate with colleagues across the district.