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DECEMBER 2022

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# FOSTERING COLLEGE INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

## A Study of Achieving the Dream in Florida

Implementing institution-wide, systemic change is typically a long and often challenging task for college leaders to undertake. Because each institution is different, the combination of internal and external factors that drive institutional change can vary greatly from college to college, and from moment to moment.

Achieving the Dream (ATD), which began as a national initiative launched by the Lumina Foundation in 2004, provides expert guidance and tools for community colleges to enact positive institutional change aimed at closing achievement gaps and accelerating student success. Focusing particularly on students from low-income backgrounds and students of color, ATD draws upon the expertise of coaches, practitioners, and institutional leaders and helps the more than 300 colleges in its network to establish evidence-based policies and practices for improving student outcomes.<sup>1</sup> See the glossary for a definition of key terms.

To further its support of institutions within its network, ATD partnered with MDRC in 2019 to investigate recent institutional change efforts at nine ATD colleges in Florida.<sup>2</sup> This set of colleges in Florida, shown in Figure 1, represents a diverse set of institutions with varying enrollment sizes, geographic environments, and levels of engagement in the ATD network. Some have been in ATD since its inception in 2004, while others joined as recently as 2018, which provides an opportunity to better understand the different stages of institutional change and the factors that facilitate change at these colleges.

This brief summarizes what stakeholders from these nine Florida colleges consider to be the common driving factors that prompted or sustained key institution-wide reforms that were reported by college leaders, faculty, and staff—as well as by ATD administrative leadership coaches, equity coaches, and student success data coaches assigned to the nine colleges. The brief also takes a closer look at these key factors and reforms at three case study colleges from this group of Florida institutions that capture different narratives of institutional change,<sup>3</sup> particularly:

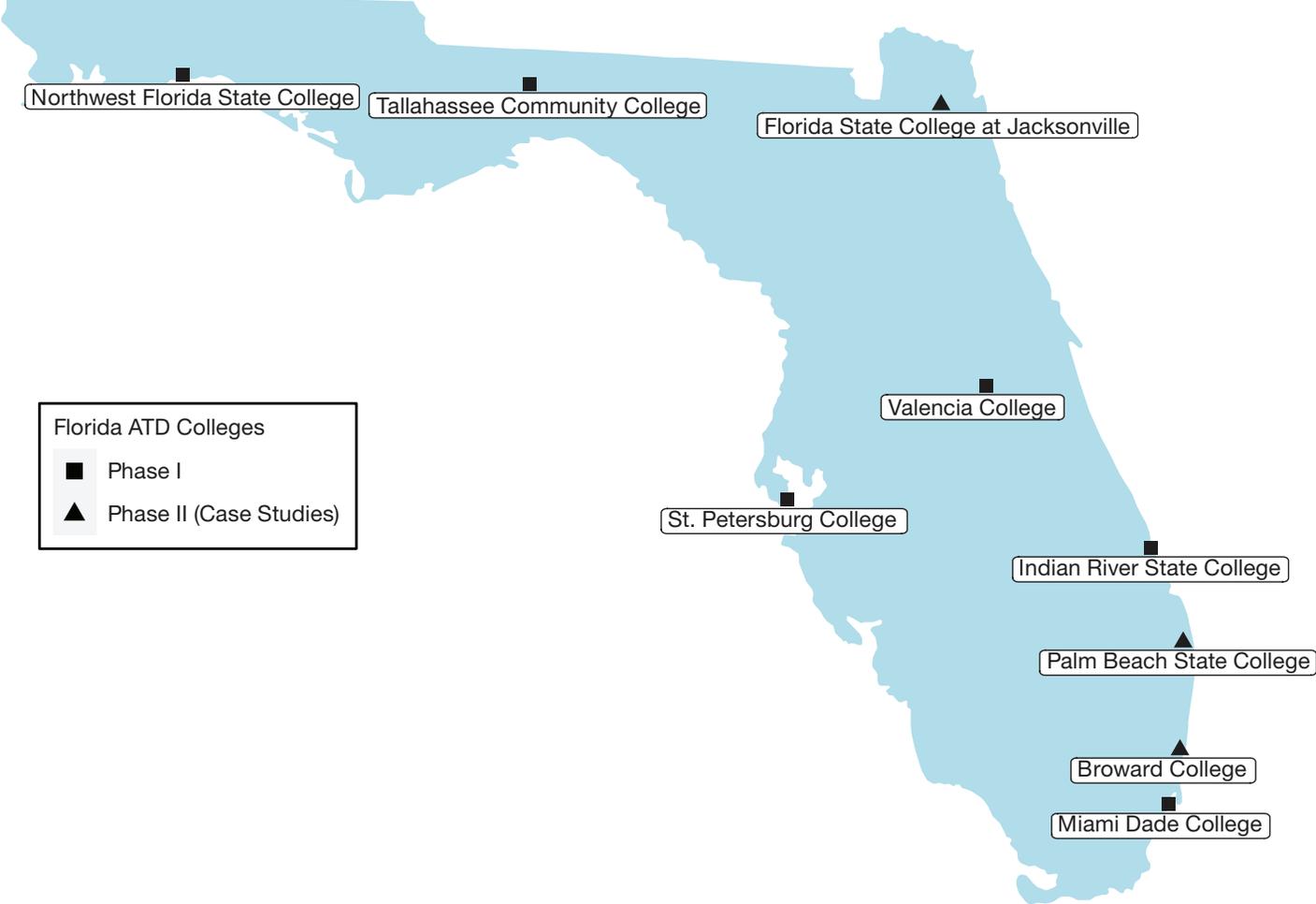
- a college addressing the challenges of building wider-scale institutional commitment for reforms—Florida State College at Jacksonville (Florida State)
- a college making strides to narrow down and prioritize various student success goals, strategies, and areas of reform—Palm Beach State College (Palm Beach)
- a college demonstrating strong organizational structure and progress on reforms—Broward College (Broward)

Achieving  
the Dream



FIGURE 1

PARTICIPATING COLLEGES IN THE FLORIDA ACHIEVING THE DREAM STUDY



## RESEARCH DESIGN

The research questions that guided this study were:

- 1 What large-scale institutional changes did colleges undertake to improve student outcomes?
- 2 What factors facilitated or hindered the college systems' change efforts?
- 3 What were the experiences of administrators, faculty, staff, and students at the case study colleges that were involved with institution-wide reform efforts?

As the initial phase of the study was already under way during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the MDRC research team added the following question to capture the Florida colleges' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- 4 What institution-wide changes did college leaders make as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Phase I of this study (2019 to 2020) employed virtual interviews with senior college administrators and key faculty and staff leading ATD teams and initiatives at seven of the nine colleges,<sup>4</sup> as well as interviews with ATD coaches assigned to the colleges in the study. Documented analyses of more than 50 college annual reports from the nine Florida colleges to the ATD network, ATD coaches' letters to colleges, and relevant college reports from 2015 until 2020 were also analyzed to understand the context under which institutional change reforms were being conducted, as well as where stakeholders at the colleges were reporting progress and success.

Phase II of the study (2020 to 2021) provided further investigation of institutional change factors at the three case study institutions at different points of their institutional change pursuits. Virtual interviews and focus groups with faculty members, front-line student services staff, and student leaders were conducted with the three case study colleges, as well as continued analysis of 2021 Annual Reflection Reports and coaches' reports about progress made in these areas of institutional change.

While this brief aims to offer context for how institutional change was perceived by various college stakeholders, the virtual interviews and focus groups consisted of a small number of senior administrators, faculty members, and student services staff at each of the colleges, along with some student leaders from two of the case study colleges.<sup>5</sup> With that in mind, the study findings are important yet partial snapshots of institutional change that do not represent a comprehensive narrative of all reforms and initiatives that the colleges have undertaken.

## FINDINGS

Phase I of the study uncovered three common focal areas of institutional change among the nine colleges:

- an emphasis on developing strategic plans with clear, adaptable goals and measures of progress
- an investment in defining and discussing equity practices and applying them to student success efforts
- an intention to establish collaborative leadership and inclusive decision-making among more faculty and staff

It is no surprise that these three areas of institutional focus are included in ATD's [Institutional Capacity Framework](#). Multiple interviewees from this study mentioned the ATD framework as an important reference point for aligning student success goals with capacity growth areas in which the institutions were investing resources, such as honing their strategic planning, increasing their understanding and application of equity standards, and fostering more leadership and collaboration among their faculty and staff members. The following section first summarizes what was learned from Phase I, followed by a closer examination of how those areas were designed and implemented at the three case study colleges during Phase II.

### Clearer and Adaptive Strategic Planning

ATD encourages its colleges to increase their strategy and planning capacities by aligning defined goals, objectives, and actions under “the umbrella goal of student success” for all students, but especially for students from low-income backgrounds and students of color. During Phase I, six of the nine Florida ATD colleges described current or forthcoming strategic plans as the primary guide for organizing their college-wide student success goals. Administrators at some of the colleges also reported using the [Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool \(ICAT\)](#)<sup>6</sup> to self-assess areas of strength and improvement so that their current or upcoming strategic plans could better reflect shifting conditions, such as budget reductions, enrollment trends, and increasingly diversified student needs and challenges, such as housing or food insecurity.<sup>7</sup> Most college leaders who were interviewed during Phase I also noted the value of receiving guidance from their ATD coaches, whom they considered important sounding boards to help them to prioritize goals when, as one faculty leader noted, “There were too many we were trying to do at once”; helping them to set more practical progress points for reaching goal benchmarks; and working with them to make sure that resources and training were allocated appropriately.

Stakeholders at the three case study colleges described developing their strategic plans with the aim of further connecting student services and academic departments under initiatives that attempted to tie them into more cohesive units:

- **Broward College’s** 2012–2017 and 2017–2022 strategic plans aimed to integrate large-scale restructuring such as Guided Pathways and holistic advising systems as key student success priorities.<sup>8</sup> One Broward senior administrator described the college’s Guided Pathways reform as “a culmination of over a decade’s worth of lessons” for restructuring its academic departments around meta-majors (which are clustered academic majors, degrees, certificates, and courses that fit within a career area), career services, and a multi-pronged “holistic” advising model aimed at better addressing the academic, social, and financial needs of their diverse student populations, including first-generation college students, English language learners, and active or reserved duty veterans. Some faculty members who were interviewed acknowledged senior administrators’ intention to solicit more input from a wider net of faculty and staff members from across the institution in their development of their 2022 strategic plan, named the Social Enterprise Plan (SEP). Broward administrators facilitated numerous focus groups with faculty and staff from multiple departments throughout the summer of 2021 to garner more awareness of and input for the new plan.

Some faculty and student services staff appreciated the new shared governance model, which one faculty member described as “a welcoming element for us to participate in creating goals and policies that affect the entire institution.” Administrators shared that members of student government and student-led campus organizations “are also heavily engaged” in the SEP process, as “many of our student leaders are assigned to meet with our cabinet members to discuss what major reforms” they think will help increase student success, such as increased access to more virtual tutoring and advising services, which increased during the onset of COVID-19. It was important to senior administrators to ensure the new plan would not only reflect the interests of more of Broward’s faculty, staff, and students, but that these interests would turn into the short- and long-term goals that would outline the SEP.

- At **Florida State College at Jacksonville**, recent strategic planning efforts began with the new president, who came on board in 2018 and made it a point to facilitate “listening sessions” across the college’s different campuses to find out what was considered important to keep, expand, or change in the strategic plan. The president then initiated the college’s ATD “relaunch” in early 2020 by engaging more faculty and staff in providing feedback and developing a student success agenda that better reflected their ideas for improving student retention outcomes. As a result of the pandemic, the college recalibrated and launched a one-year strategic plan because COVID-19 forced it to halt its longer-term plans and, as one administrator noted, “stay responsive to the fast-growing needs within our student community.” With the one-year plan in place, college leaders assessed how well their efforts were keeping students connected to the college through virtual courses and remote supports, what worked well, and what to sustain based on changes they made during the pandemic. College leaders began working on a new three-year [Visionary Impact Plan 2.0](#) that became official at the end of 2021 and built on the progress made from the one-year plan. Faculty members and staff at the college admitted that they did not know a new plan was under construction but did identify key strategies that the college had committed to investing in, which included having more wrap-around supports for improving retention rates, for increasing

staff engagement in equity training, and for increasing training and resources for faculty to curate online and mobile-friendly courses.

- **Palm Beach State College** joined ATD in 2018 with goals to strengthen alignment and collaboration across its five campuses. At that time, the college’s separate campuses largely acted independently of one another, with each having its own approaches and priorities for enacting student success. To create a cohesive “one-college identity,” as one administrator described, the college’s leaders crafted more than 100 desired success outcomes to include as part of their early original strategic plan. With support from their ATD coaches, the college’s administrative leaders whittled down this ambitious plan to a much smaller number of primary institutional goals centered around better integrating retention reforms that are student-centered. Senior administrators who were interviewed during Phase I acknowledged that the need to rework their strategic plan in 2019 helped them focus on integrating personnel and resources with fewer goals and priorities, such as its [Loss Momentum](#) initiative, which was developed to bind campuses and student service departments together to support students’ transitions from initial enrollment through degree attainment or transfer more cohesively. Faculty and staff members appreciated that Loss Momentum was designed to focus on the experiences of students “from start to finish,” with some interviewees noting that this framework allowed for more consistency in offering campus services at different stages of students’ college experiences.

Senior administrators from the three case study colleges described developing strategic plans with indicators of progress that helped college leaders assess whether goals were being reached in the time and fashion that they anticipated, or whether adjustments needed to be made. Those who worked with ATD coaches on their strategic planning process found ways to organize large-scale efforts into focused categories with a limited scope and manageable timelines for planning and implementation. At the same time, they understood that external forces such as the global pandemic and changing state policies might mean that they would have to reconsider any adjustments to their plans but that they could do so without losing sight of long-term goals to improve student success. Colleges were also more intentional about adopting strategic plans that better represented the interests of faculty, staff, and students.

### **An Increased Focus on Equity**

As described in [Achieving the Dream’s Equity Statement](#),<sup>9</sup> creating equitable outcomes that improve student success for historically underserved populations calls for colleges to eliminate barriers by incorporating standards of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into college-wide reforms. The statement also encourages colleges to consider equity within their local contexts, thereby creating institutional practices that will be more responsive to the particular student populations they serve.

With many of the Florida ATD colleges now serving a larger percentage of students of color than in years past,<sup>10</sup> the majority of those colleges have identified equity as a Student Success Priority Goal in recent ATD Annual Reflection Reports. Most of the Florida ATD colleges currently have an official

equity statement, referencing the importance of providing services and opportunities that best fit the needs of their diverse student populations. While the colleges reported an increased institutional focus on equity, the progress made on discussing and operationalizing equity varied across the nine institutions. Some of the colleges have moved forward with making actionable policies and practices with an equity lens. As shown in Table 1, most of the Florida ATD colleges in this study have conducted a variety of activities that help inform their understanding of equity in concept and since 2015, which include establishing DEI offices and equity committees with multiple stakeholder participation, facilitating college-wide discussions to review achievement gaps identified from student data that is disaggregated by race, gender, and other demographic markers. These discussions have led many of the colleges to create programs for student groups that have traditionally gone underserved, such as male students of color<sup>11</sup> and English language learners.<sup>12</sup>

**TABLE 1**  
**DISTRIBUTION OF EQUITY-BASED ACTIVITIES IN**  
**FLORIDA ACHIEVING THE DREAM STUDY COLLEGES**

<b>EQUITY-RELATED ACTIVITY</b>	<b>NUMBER OF COLLEGES</b>
Hosted at least one Equity Summit	3
Posted a public equity statement	6
Identified a cross-department equity committee	5
Analyzed disaggregated data by race, ethnicity, and/or gender to identify equity gaps	5
Offered targeted program or services to underserved groups	5

SOURCES: Interviews with representatives from seven of the nine Florida ATD study colleges and document reviews of the nine colleges’ annual ATD reports (2015–2019).

Phase II of this study provided a closer look at different equity-based reforms implemented at the three case study colleges and how these actions served to inform and reinforce student success priorities:

- Administrators, faculty, and staff at **Florida State College at Jacksonville** generally recognized its [Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) to be an important investment that the college has made toward promoting equity across the institution. Administrators reported that the office has sponsored annual Equity Town Halls in recent years that bring together faculty members, student services staff, and student leaders to first discuss what was needed to drive equitable access and achievement for the diverse student population at the college. College leaders reported that the institution’s [Office of Training and Organizational Development](#) increased its offerings of equity-focused workshops starting in the 2018–2019 academic year, adding topics such as Gaining Competence in Social Justice, Cultural Sensitivity Techniques, and Universal Design in Learning

Strategies. When asked how the college has embedded equity-based practices into student success efforts, some faculty and staff pointed to the Equity Committee's launching of the [Weekend College](#), which has expanded another option for students who work full time or tend to family matters during the work week, recognizing how equity policies also need to consider students' different life priorities and availability.

- Responses from **Broward's** 2015 Institutional Capacity Assessment indicated that campus stakeholders wanted college leaders to make equity and inclusion higher priorities for the college. Student services staff who were interviewed in 2020 echoed this sentiment, suggesting that the college had made progress in starting discussions about equity, but there was still a need for “amplifying people and communities to be more at the center of student success improvement,” as one staff member described. In response, the college created an advisory council for diversity, equity, and inclusion made up of faculty and staff that worked on infusing equity-based standards for hiring policies, pedagogical and curricular practices, and wider-scale use of student performance data disaggregated by race and ethnicity. Faculty members also mentioned culturally responsive initiatives, such as their multi-department English Language Programs Task Force, which customized curricular and student services for the college's growing foreign-born populations, and the [Minority Male Initiative](#), which was based on discussions about disaggregated data revealing that Black male students had dramatically lower completion and persistence rates than other students at the college, spurring college leaders to offer more customized supports for Black males and other male students of color. College leaders also strengthened community partnerships with local high schools by making Broward the first college to partner with the [Peer Forward](#) national program, which trains students to serve as peer mentors for incoming first-generation students of color from local high schools.<sup>13</sup>
- According to some **Palm Beach State College** faculty and staff, their college has come a long way in establishing equity as a critical component for increasing overall student success. College administrators noted the dramatic increase of Afro-Caribbean students and other immigrant populations that were enrolling at the college, which prompted them to assess how well their courses and services are responding to the needs of those populations. In 2020, the college established the [Dr. Barbara Carey-Shuler Equity Institute](#) to create and disseminate resources and innovative techniques that reflect an institution-wide commitment to addressing issues related to equity and inclusion. Similar to Broward, Palm Beach State College has designated more faculty workshops on culturally responsive pedagogy and for mentoring men of color on academic success, leadership, and career ambition. A college administrator associated with the Institute revealed that these workshops were necessary because “students of color, particularly the men, did not feel comfortable on our campus,” which she considers a factor that leads to their low enrollment and high dropout rates. College administrators said they also have plans to expand faculty and staff training to focus on addressing issues of homelessness and financial hardship, as well as conducting racial justice forums that delve into the effects of racism on the college's students of color.

Defining equity was lauded by most faculty and staff as an important step in educating the rest of the college community about how their institution was promoting and investing in equity-based policies through professional development, discussions of data, and cultural programs for students of color and/or students from marginalized communities. Interviewees highlighted the importance of institution-wide equity discussions and continuing to remain inclusive and responsive to the colleges' varied stakeholders, while also acknowledging the challenges of incorporating the varied perspectives and experiences that promote equity in a way that represents as many people as possible.

### **Collaborative Leadership and Inclusive Decision-Making**

ATD's emphasis on increasing the capacity for institutional change includes strengthening colleges' internal and external partnerships to help execute student success initiatives. During the Phase I interviews, leaders from the nine Florida ATD colleges in the study reported that their ATD coaches encouraged them to find opportunities to foster cross-department collaboration and to increase the delegation of decision-making. The Florida colleges attempted many different strategies to engage faculty and staff since 2015, including providing opportunities for them to take responsibility for institution-wide initiatives, as well as inviting part-time staff and adjunct faculty to contribute to larger-scale reform work. For example, as learned during Phase II of the study:

- Interview and focus group participants shared that **Florida State's** 2021 Guided Pathways initiative is a prime example of the college administration's efforts to foster collaborative leadership. More than 120 faculty and staff members developed academic program reviews to align programs and pathways with labor market trends and students' diverse career interests. College leaders reported designating a wider range of faculty and staff "champions" to directly guide the restructuring of the academic and student affairs department and to lead the development of toolkits to support advising staff in the use of resources such as individual academic plans and degree roadmaps. Some faculty members who were interviewed explained that these champions will also facilitate more cross-department discussion about sharing student data. According to one faculty member, "student services have a lot of data about students' lives outside of class, but we don't get to see that." Faculty think that these data discussions will continue to illuminate key areas of nonacademic issues and needs that students typically raise with academic advisors, financial aid officers, or other student services staff, but will now also inform faculty how they can help better support their students so they keep attending class and are not afraid to approach instructors when they need extra help.
- At **Broward**, college leaders reported the necessity of increasing faculty training to support students holistically and to better identify and respond to students' nonacademic needs. While advisors mentioned that the college's advising restructuring in recent years has been beneficial for them to learn about students' specific areas of need, many consider holistic advising to also be a faculty responsibility, given that instructors would be the first to know if and when students stop attending their classes. "[Advisors] need to work more with instructors so that they can alert us about what's going on with students, since they see them more than we do," explained one advi-

sor. In response, Broward expanded its data capacity by enlisting more college personnel from different departments and divisions to work in tandem with their research departments to develop more efficient intra-data use procedures.

- As mentioned earlier, **Palm Beach State College**'s Loss Momentum initiative became a key priority that college leadership integrated into their 2021 strategic planning. The initiative started a few years prior as a collaboration between an associate professor and a senior administrator from the college's strategic planning team interested in redesigning the student experience and their engagement in their courses and on campus. These college leaders felt that the redesign was necessary to prevent students from slowing down or dropping out altogether by building stronger ties between different campus supports, such as orientation and advising so that services were better coordinated and communicated. One administrator noted the importance of having direct services staff and adjunct faculty involved in finalizing the design of the Loss Momentum initiative, stating that their input was valuable "because they interact with the students most directly and can see how our decisions will affect their lives." Decisions for implementing the new journey mapping included students' regular participation in strategic team meetings and follow-up student focus groups during the implementation of the Loss Momentum program. As one faculty leader noted, "It's important not to make assumptions about what our students experience...let's ask them."

## COMMON CHALLENGES TO INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Wide-scale institutional change comes with a variety of constraints that can derail plans and prevent the desired change from occurring, a not uncommon experience among college leaders as they try to navigate reforms amid internal and external obstacles that can cause unanticipated delays or disruptions. These challenges play a role in shifting initial expectations for what changes will occur, how long it will take for change to occur, and whether alternatives need to be considered should the original plans fall through. Some of the difficulties that the nine ATD study colleges faced with implementing institutional transformation included fragmented communication systems (although some colleges reported making upgrades to their systems during the course of this study); limited time or incentive for faculty and staff to engage in capacity-building opportunities and professional development; and disruptions to enrollment, instruction, and student engagement as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the abrupt shift to virtual courses and remote student services.

Many administrators, faculty, and staff reported that the most common challenge faced during times of institutional change was fragmented communication, acknowledging the difficulties of sustaining real-time messaging across their multiple campuses. Timely, uniform communication was considered most challenging at colleges with decentralized structures that had separate presidents and senior cabinets for each for their campuses, or when colleges did not have a centralized communication platform to disseminate messages about priorities or updates across multiple levels of personnel. Although college leaders indicated that their strategic planning processes were more inclusive than prior iterations, faculty members and direct service staff who were interviewed agreed that a sub-

stantial number of their peers likely did not know or fully understand the current student success goals set forth in their strategic plans, only that they were expected to raise student success outcomes such as course completion rates. Finally, some faculty and staff acknowledged initial communication breakdowns during the early stages of their academic department restructure into career pathways, as differing interpretations of new pathway requirements between and across departments were still being established.

Student leaders who were interviewed also described frustration with inconsistent communication, noting instances of students being assigned to pathways that they no longer wanted to pursue because, “I wasn’t given the full picture of all [courses] I had to take and my advisor had been changed midway, giving me different information than what my first advisor told me.” Although most of the nine colleges made strides toward implementing wider-scale reforms, common pitfalls of decentralized or inconsistent communication across campuses and departments hindered students’ understanding of how reforms helped them to successfully pass courses and pursue degree attainment or transfer requirements.

Like many other ATD colleges across the country, most of the nine ATD colleges in Florida conducted campus-wide town hall meetings to disseminate information about wide-scale goals and plans to a large audience of the institution. Some of the town hall events focused on special topics, such as equity, to help faculty and staff across the institution better understand this concept in relation to their roles and responsibilities, as well as to offer training from equity experts to show how equity can be assessed using data, and how equity-based pedagogy and support can be provided to students. Other town hall meetings were used as “working sessions” during which stakeholders from across the campus worked together on shoring up areas of need for new initiatives, such as holistic advising and academic pathway redesigns. The town hall events became especially critical during the early stages of the pandemic, when the virtual town halls that college leaders facilitated were widely attended by college stakeholders eager to find out what institutional changes were being implemented in response to the pandemic.

## **LESSONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE**

This study highlights the key institutional capacity factors that college leaders and stakeholders from nine Florida ATD colleges selected to strengthen and improve wide-scale reforms aimed at improving student success. As a group, the colleges in the study chose to establish clearer, designated student success goals within their strategic plans; elevate equity definitions and practices; and develop more faculty and staff leadership committed to building collaborative systems and structures. These colleges also experienced general challenges to widely communicating with and involving a larger portion of the campus community in promoting an understanding of centralized goals and strategies for positive institutional change. They also struggled with determining the most effective ways to demonstrate how these strategies can be incorporated into faculty and staff members’ everyday responsibilities to help more students succeed. As a result, the process for creating positive institu-

tional change has been incremental and continuous at the colleges, which are also making efforts to reduce barriers to achieving their desired changes.

Phase II of the study explored the unique factors that facilitated or hindered institutional change at the three case study colleges. During data collection, each institution had either recently completed a new strategic planning process or was designing new plans. The institutions were also developing more faculty and staff leadership opportunities within various strategic initiatives and dedicating more resources to embed policies and practices focused on equity. These case studies also provide further insights from various college stakeholders about how they can remain responsive to students' growing needs that arise during a global pandemic.

Following are the main findings across the case study colleges, as well as recommendations for the nine Florida colleges, the national ATD network, and the broader postsecondary education field to consider.

- **Colleges can benefit from making strategic planning more inclusive and widely shared.**

Interview participants at the case study colleges generally conveyed the importance of developing strategic plans that articulate a collective understanding of student success goals. With the help of their ATD coaches, these colleges developed more streamlined strategic plans with more focused and actionable student success goals. Interviewees cited how an inclusive process for better understanding and creating institution-wide goals helps to foster stronger commitment and more collective buy-in for reaching these goals. One way to do that is to offer more college-wide forums and town-hall events that focus on discussing strategic plans and institution-wide goals. Providing opportunities for the larger audience of faculty, staff, and students to better understand and contribute to the development of strategic plans (including any changes to the plans) can reinforce the central vision and actionable goals set forth to achieve system-wide change and improve student success rates.

- **Colleges can institutionalize data use across staff levels and provide the necessary training for the efficient use of data collection platforms.**

Colleges would benefit from creating data-tracking systems that faculty and student services staff can access to help them understand how their students are faring. Given faculty and staff's interest at the case study colleges in accessing and using more student success data, colleges—and ATD—should consider encouraging them to engage in more data collection and analysis for measuring student enrollment, completion, and learning outcomes that can inform the types of interactions they will have with students. It will be equally important for colleges to provide the proper training to faculty and advisors through institutional researchers with the know-how for navigating data-collecting systems.

- **Colleges can make equity a central part of professional development, institution-wide discussions, and hiring practices.**

Most of the case study colleges' stakeholders mentioned a variety of ways that their institutions have increased efforts to address the needs of their diverse student populations, particularly for Black and Latinx<sup>14</sup> students, veterans, students with disabilities and other groups that have historically been underserved. While interview participants from the three case study colleges recognized that these efforts represent slow but steady cultural changes on campus, some think more can be done to promote equity as an institutional priority. College leaders may consider making more investments for providing release time and other incentives for faculty and staff to participate in what are generally optional professional development opportunities so that increasing their capacity for equity feels like an integral part of their role, not an additional burden. Similarly, college leaders can hold institution-wide events such as Equity Town Halls as required activities so that all college stakeholders can participate in discussions about what equity means to student success goals for all students. Finally, it is important for colleges to do a better job of ensuring that decisions for hiring and promoting more diverse faculty and staff members from demographic groups closely reflect the diverse communities that their students represent.

- **Colleges can develop more opportunities to foster collaborative leadership for faculty and staff.**

As explored through the case studies, ATD coaches urged administrators to identify opportunities to foster cross-department collaboration initiatives and to increase delegation of decision-making processes so that the implementation of student success goals would be informed by those who regularly interact with students. Cross-department, inter-campus workgroups, task forces, and initiative-specific committees are all examples of approaches that promote collaborative, representative leadership beyond senior administrators. These groups can in turn produce more support and investment by faculty and staff for implementing student success goals. Collaborative leadership opportunities can also be extended to allow faculty and student services staff to engage in more data collection and analysis for measuring student enrollment, course completion, and degree attainment that can inform the types of interactions they will have with students.

- **Colleges can reflect on keeping COVID-19 adaptations that students found useful.**

Like most colleges across the country, the three case study colleges immediately pivoted to virtual instruction and online student services in response to the onset of COVID-19 and subsequent Stay at Home Orders in March 2020. These adaptations required leadership, faculty, and staff to adopt new modes of operation, which included technology enhancements and training to deliver virtual instruction, online support services, and increased outreach to students in need of emergency aid or technology in order to continue attending classes. Moving forward, colleges can continue to assess the right balance of on-campus and virtual or online options for students based on their current needs and on changing circumstances that events such as a global pandemic present.

## CONCLUSION

Since its inception in 2004, Achieving the Dream has become an important source of guidance and exemplars for colleges seeking ways to strengthen and improve their approaches to creating positive institutional change. ATD's Institutional Capacity Framework has helped guide the planning, delegation, and investments that colleges have made for enacting large-scale and sustainable change. Although each of the nine Florida colleges that participated in this study have undertaken their institutional changes differently, all of them focused on clearer and more actionable strategic planning, further embedding equity into policies and practices, and increasing opportunities for different departments to collaborate on student success initiatives while cultivating more faculty and staff leaders to steer those initiatives. ATD leadership and coaches continue to work closely with college leaders to strengthen their institutional change efforts and to help them garner more buy-in from their campus communities to translate their efforts into improved student success outcomes and institutional transformation that is long-lasting.

## GLOSSARY

**Coaches** – ATD engages its network colleges in whole-college transformation using a coaching process that is informed and continuously improved by longstanding partnerships and practice in the field. The primary responsibility of ATD coaches is to help colleges build capacity, lead systemic reform and sustain continuous improvement. ATD coaches participate in robust professional learning opportunities to support their work. ATD coaches embed themselves in the culture of the organization, endeavoring to be a trusted advisor by asking clarifying, thought-provoking questions about the college’s student success work.

**Core Teams** - College leadership teams that identify and implement evidence-based reform strategies and engage the wider campus community in discussions about the goals and strategies to improve student success. The core team consists of a broadly representative group of college leaders at all levels of the organization who are highly regarded, influential members of the college community. While this is usually not an official governance body, its priorities and decisions guide the student success work at each college. The team generates energy and urgency for change as team members reinforce one another’s commitment and work together to infuse their shared vision throughout the institution.

**Guided Pathways** – Guided pathways is a whole-college redesign model designed to help all students explore, choose, plan, and complete programs aligned with their career and education goals efficiently and affordably. The [guided pathways model](#) calls for systematic changes in policies, practices, and systems in four areas: 1. clarifying paths to student education and career goals; 2. helping students [get on a path](#); 3. keeping students on the path; and 4. ensuring students are learning across programs to support labor market value.

**Holistic Student Supports** – An approach designed to provide all students with the type and intensity of support they need to complete their credentials. The intensive support also works within the pathways framework to help students identify and select the best pathway to achieve their educational and career goals. A holistic approach meets students where they are, addresses their individual needs, leverages their strengths, and focuses on student development and learning.

**Student Success** – The outcome of a personal, rigorous, and enriching learning experience that culminates in the achievement of students’ academic goals and prepares them to realize their career aspirations.

**Underserved Populations** – In the United States, students who are considered underserved by their institutions with respect to access, supports, and outcomes include students of first-generation immigrants; from families with low incomes; of adult status; of color; of marginalized gender identities; from second-language backgrounds; of undocumented status; with military service; with disabilities; with dependents; in foster care; or with records of incarceration.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1** Learn more at [www.achievingthedream.org](http://www.achievingthedream.org).
- 2** The nine colleges are Broward College, Florida State College at Jacksonville, Indian River State College, Miami Dade College, Northwest Florida State College, Palm Beach State College, St. Petersburg College, Tallahassee Community College, and Valencia College.
- 3** Broward College, Florida State College at Jacksonville, and Palm Beach State College.
- 4** Two of the nine Florida ATD colleges elected not to participate in qualitative interviews or focus groups, though the research team did conduct analyses of the documents that these two colleges provided to ATD leadership between 2015 and 2019.
- 5** The research team did not conduct student focus groups at Broward College due to their unavailability during summer 2021.
- 6** For more information about ATD's Institutional Capacity Framework, please see: [https://achievingthedream.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/atd\\_institutional\\_capacity\\_and\\_assessment\\_tool\\_2018.pdf](https://achievingthedream.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/atd_institutional_capacity_and_assessment_tool_2018.pdf).
- 7** For the purposes of this study, food insecurity refers to the level of access and intake of food by students enrolled in college. For more information, please see: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/definitions-of-food-security/>.
- 8** In response to Florida's statewide recommendations for integrating meta-majors with associate's degree requirements and transfer criteria, Guided Pathways arose from colleges' efforts to redesign their student success goals so their students could more easily acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to meet labor market and workforce demands after graduation.
- 9** In early 2022, ATD released a new equity statement to reflect a greater push for colleges in the network to design and implement antiracist and just structures, policies, and practices to combat oppression that their students and communities experience.
- 10** An analysis of student fall enrollments from 2016 through 2020 at the nine Florida ATD colleges indicates an increase in non-white students of color at each college, ranging from 1.09 percent to 7.83 percent.
- 11** See Alyssa Gardenhire and Oscar Cerna, "Boosting College Success Among Men of Color: Promising Approaches and Next Steps," December (New York City: MDRC, 2016) [https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/2016\\_MenofColor\\_Final.pdf](https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/2016_MenofColor_Final.pdf).
- 12** See Olga Rodriguez, Sarah Bohn, Laura Hill, and Bonnie Brooks, "English as a Second Language in California's Community Colleges," April (San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California, 2019) <https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/english-as-a-second-language-in-californias-community-colleges.pdf>.
- 13** Beginning in 2021, Broward participated in the inaugural cohort of the ATD and USC Race and Equity Center Racial Equity Leadership Academy.
- 14** The United States Census defines Latino (masculine) or Latina (feminine) as any person of "Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin." In recent years, research literature and other publications have begun using "Latinx" as a broader, gender-neutral reference for this population. See Emilia Benton, "What is Latinx?" website: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-latinx-5089296>, 2022.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This brief of the Florida Achieving the Dream (ATD) Institutional Change study and the research activities supporting this study were made possible through the generous support of ECMC Foundation.

The authors would like to thank the administrators, faculty, staff, students, and community partners associated with the nine Florida ATD colleges that participated in focus groups and interviews for this study, as well as the ATD coaches that also lent their time for interviews. We would also like to thank Devora Shamah at ATD for her steady guidance on decisions for research design, data collection, analysis planning, and dissemination as part of this study, as well as her review of this brief and of other study deliverables. Additional thanks go to Shara Davis, Emily Froimson, Susan Mayer, and Karen Stout at ATD for their review and comments on the brief.

At MDRC, the authors would like to thank Alexander Mayer, Rashida Welbeck, and former MDRC staff member Elizabeth Zachry Rutschow for their reviews and comments. Finally, we thank the publications staff at MDRC, including Luisa LaFleur and Ali Tufel, who edited the brief, and Carolyn Thomas who prepared the brief for publication.

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Dissemination of MDRC publications is supported by the following organizations and individuals that help finance MDRC's public policy outreach and expanding efforts to communicate the results and implications of our work to policymakers, practitioners, and others: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Arnold Ventures, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, Daniel and Corinne Goldman, The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Inc., The JPB Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, and Sandler Foundation.

In addition, earnings from the MDRC Endowment help sustain our dissemination efforts. Contributors to the MDRC Endowment include Alcoa Foundation, The Ambrose Monell Foundation, Anheuser-Busch Foundation, Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The Grable Foundation, The Elizabeth and Frank Newman Charitable Foundation, The New York Times Company Foundation, Jan Nicholson, Paul H. O'Neill Charitable Foundation, John S. Reed, Sandler Foundation, and The Stupski Family Fund, as well as other individual contributors.

The findings and conclusions in this brief do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders.

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