

PATHWAYS TO RESULTS

IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERSHIPS STRATEGY BRIEF

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Office of Community College Research and Leadership

Reaching for Equity in Dental Assistance: Solving Issues of Access for In-District Students at Prairie State College

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Prairie State College (PSC), located near Chicago, serves a geographically and racially diverse district and is designated as a Predominately Black Institution (PBI). Though located in a diverse region, PSC's dental hygiene program, which relies on a selective admissions process, has historically been comprised of a largely white and female student body. PSC's most recent Pathways to Results (PTR) project identified the composition of in-district versus out-of-district students as a key factor contributing to racial equity gaps in the program.

Identifying the Problem

In Illinois, cooperative agreements approved by the Illinois Community College Board allow individual students to enroll in out-of-district programs at in-district rates if the programs are not offered at the student's in-district community college (Illinois Community College Board, 2018). Thus, the team found that the requirements associated with these agreements had equity implications for PSC's dental hygiene program that are accessible to multiple community college districts. Prior to applying to the PSC dental hygiene program, out-of-district students are required to complete all available general education courses at their in-district community college. This has contributed to inequity in the application process with in-district students who have completed far fewer college-level courses at the time of application, resulting in lower scores in the final ranking system. Essentially, out-of-district students were being rated higher for admission into PSC's dental hygiene program since they had finished all of their general education coursework.

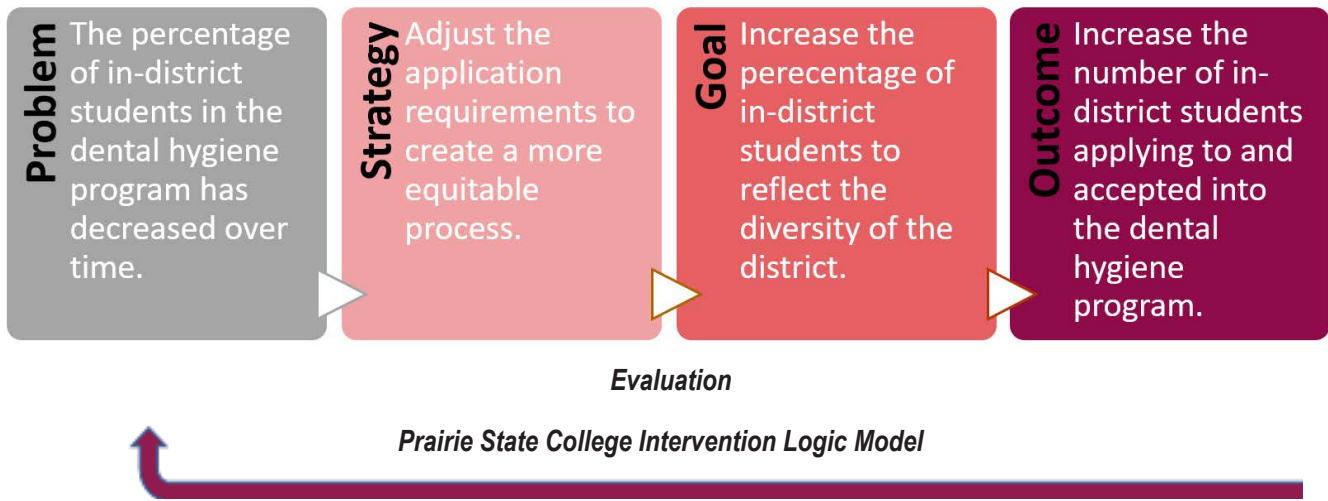
Furthermore, PSC's data identified 78% of applicants and admitted students as coming from outside of the district, leaving only 22% of applicants and admitted students from inside the district. The team understood this as a major inequity before looking at the formal data. Recent observations indicated that dental hygiene graduates were overwhelmingly young, White women. Again, this is not representative of the district's student demographics, which is made up of predominantly African-American or Black individuals.

PSC's Improvement

The primary goal of PSC's project was to create an application and admission process that would address inequities for in-district students. PSC realized that the current system was not set up equitably and needed to be changed in order to serve its community and students in an improved manner.

About Pathways to Results: Implementation Partnerships

PTR is an outcomes-focused, equity-guided process to improve student transition to and through postsecondary education and into employment. The process engages community college practitioners and their partners to identify and understand the problematic aspects of systemic design--whether processes, practices, policies, or pedagogies--and to find sustainable solutions that will support equitable student outcomes. In 2016, a second project year was added to the Pathways to Results model, titled PTR: Implementation Partnerships. Teams who participated in an Implementation Partnership, or "Year Two," project work to implement, evaluate, and scale their work in a network of other colleges striving to improve equitable student outcomes in innovative ways.



PSC now advises all program applicants to complete all of their general education requirements before applying, regardless of in-district or out-of-district status. The team has also begun to evaluate applicants based on their Health Education Systems Incorporated (HESI) scores as well as their scores in the classes Biology 221, Biology 222, and Chemistry 105 or 110, all of which are now required for entry into the dental hygiene program.

An additional change PSC is implementing in an effort to create improved opportunities for in-district students is the inception of a new certificate program for dental assistants. Students not admitted into the dental hygiene degree program will be encouraged to pursue this certificate, which can create a pathway into the larger dental hygiene degree after completion. With these improvements, PSC’s dental hygiene program is already seeing more equitable admission numbers. For the incoming class of 2018, in-district students represent 38% of admitted students, a 16% increase compared to previous averages.

Mapping the Logic Model

In order to solve the issue of inequity of admission for in-district students, PSC had to have an understanding of contributing factors to the problem. Through their work with PTR, the PSC dental hygiene program discovered that its admission process was creating disadvantages for in-district students who wanted to matriculate into the program. The goal for the team was to then find equitable solutions that made in-district students competitive applicants for admission. During the course of one academic year, the result of this project is the percentage of in-district students who were

admitted into the dental hygiene program has increased from 22% to 38%.

Notes on Scaling and Sustainability

As stated earlier, one of PSC’s initiatives is to create a dental assistant certification as an option for students who are not strong applicants so that they can earn a credential via a career pathway and later advance to earn an associate’s degree. While the team is pleased with the development of the new certificate program, the importance of students continuing their education is also understood and valued. In addition, the team is considering the equity implications associated with removing barriers that are often connected with developmental education for in-district students who are interested in the program.

Acknowledgements

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Reference

Illinois Community College Board (2018, May 4). [System rules manual of the Illinois Community College Board.](#)