

## Building a Peer Mentoring Community: Midland College, Temple College, Odessa College, and Howard College/Concho Valley

Sometimes a Texas Peer Mentor Network (TX-PMN) site visit is not long enough to share all the great ideas and information when colleges meet for one day at one institution. As the Midland College and Howard College/Concho Valley site visitors left Temple College at the end of February 2019, they decided to carry the conversation and peer mentoring further by offering the Temple AEL team a chance to visit Midland's ESL program in April.

Midland and Howard Colleges were both participants in the 2017-2018 TX-PMN group, so in 2018-2019, they assisted in providing mentoring to the new participants, such as Temple College. Once the dates were set for a two-day visit, April 15-16, Midland extended the proposed peer network meeting to include Odessa College, their neighbor and partner in education in the Permian Basin. As a result, Denise Perdue, Odessa's new Adult Education Director, came to the Midland Campus to join Midland, Howard, and Temple Colleges for two days of peer mentoring.

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Other key participants in the April meeting were Midland's Lynda Webb, AEL Associate Dean, and Luisa Nail, AEL Coordinator; the Howard College participant was Cheryl Smith, Career Navigator; and Temple College representatives included Stephanie Perkins, AEL Director, and Alexandria Siprian, Career Navigator.

On Tuesday afternoon, the group discussed the new CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System) test, for the benefit of the Midland staff. As Midland is vested in using the TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education), it was interesting to share information about why some of their sister institutions are switching assessment tools to CASAS during the next enrollment year. Stephanie Perkins from Temple and Cheryl Smith from Howard helped the Midland staff consider a way to change to a new assessment tool without too much pain. With Dr. Perdue new in her position, it was a great chance for everyone to share experiences, explain the language of AEL, and discuss opportunities for collaboration with her. Luisa Nail, Midland College's AEL Coordinator, presented the ESL curriculum they have developed over the past seven years to the other college representatives. Ms. Nail shared the rationale for Midland's changes in 2012 and the way each lesson was structured by topic, week, and level. In the evening, everyone had a chance to view the ESL classes and IET programs and to meet with instructors at the South Campus.

On Wednesday morning, the group convened at the South Campus again to visit the day classes and to see the curriculum in actual operation. Midland shared their curriculum and discussed the EL Civics IET programs that are in place—Network Technician, Commercial Truck Driving, and Certified Nurse Assistant. In the course of their conversations, Temple’s new staff person, Alexandria Siprian, was able to help Dr. Perdue learn about the importance of a career navigator and best practices for student engagement outside of the classroom. The time together was a great experience for everyone to share best practices, tricks and tips in TEAMS, “who to call” if the AEL world comes crashing down, and most importantly, the fact that no director or AEL lead is ever alone. Each person at the table reported their experiences with program improvement plans at some point in an organization’s life, and, happily, they all have survived.

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At the end of the second day, Cheryl Smith from Howard College and Dr. Perdue from Odessa College stayed for the outreach/collective action project that Midland’s AEL program has developed. The Hispanic Outreach Committee met at 4:30 in the afternoon and shared with everyone the projects that have been completed, along with new initiatives. Midland College is partnering with two schools with high ESL populations both to recruit adult students and, even more importantly, to share resources within the community.

Midland is also partnering with the *First 5* initiative in the Permian Basin, which serves young children going to school for the first time who will enroll into kindergarten in the Fall. As the children will be in class across the street from Midland College’s South Campus, the adults who bring the children to school will have an opportunity to cross the street and learn basic digital literacy skills and to gain an understanding about early literacy’s impact on a child’s life. Midland’s AEL program has partnered with the neighboring elementary school to recruit new adult students. At a PTA meeting in January, the AEL staff and parents who have children at South Elementary School spoke about the many opportunities available for adults through the AEL program. As a result of that meeting, Midland College recruited five new students to the IET classes and more than twenty students into basic ESL classes.

Those who have participated in the Texas Peer Mentor Network over the past two years continue to build on what they have learned at their own institutions, but also to share what they are doing with their AEL peers at other colleges and institutions. The ad hoc April convening of four Texas colleges in Midland is an excellent example of how peer mentoring among Texas AEL programs is moving forward.