

Highlighting a S.T.A.R. — System with Targeted Actions and Results

As part of Texas Peer Mentor Network (TX-PMN) mentoring activities, Austin Community College (ACC) visited a S.T.A.R. — Navarro College (NC) in Corsicana, Texas. The night before the February 6, 2020, visit there was an atypical snowfall, which provided the ACC team, Kathy Dowdy, AEL Executive Director, and Susan Gusler, Adult Education Program Director, some great views on the drive up to Corsicana. Navarro is a beautiful campus of traditional red brick buildings, including dormitories. NC's AEL department is housed in the Gooch One Stop Student Center at the heart of the campus. Upon arrival at the Gooch Center, AEL Director Leslie Hayes greeted the visitors. Leslie announced that she tried to have the NC National Champion Cheer team (made even more famous by the Netflix show, *CHEER*) visit with the visitors, but they were unavailable because they were being interviewed by Netflix that same day!

Student Services, Structure*: Navarro College is one of five AEL providers serving the North Central Workforce Development Area. NC's AEL service area is somewhat different from that of the College. The NC AEL team has done an outstanding job serving a geographically vast service area that is both rural and urban and with differing economic needs. They have responded to this challenge and worked hard to tailor services for their communities. NC AEL offers most of their Healthcare IETs in Farris, and a new welding academic IET is now offered at the NC campus in Corsicana. They also have AEL classes in Forney, Waxahachie, Ennis, and other towns in the area. Because their college's service area goes to the south and west toward Waco, and the majority of the NC AEL service area is to the north of Corsicana and close to Dallas, NC AEL has collaborated with the Heart of Texas AEL service provider, McLennan Community College, to provide AEL services to students at the southern NC campuses, such as the one in Mexia.

Student Services, Structure, Leadership/Culture: Throughout the day, the ACC team got to meet and hear from Leslie Hayes, AEL Director; Kelly Meeks, Career Navigator; Thelma Johnson, AEL Administrative Assistant; Lisa Rogers, IET Support Instructor; Sarah Davidson, TEAMS Data; and Andria Biggs, Career Navigator Assistant. Quality and consistent customer service to all of NC students is a value apparent throughout all of the NC AEL team's work.

Student Services, Structure, Data Integration: Data Integration with the college's systems has been a challenge for NC AEL. They presently have a parallel, but separate system for AEL students related to parking, class schedules, student IDs, enrollment, and emergency notifications. However, to fully integrate into NC's main ERP and assign AEL students a unique NC student ID, the ACC visitors suggested finding champions in NC Admissions and IT offices. A good starting point would be to stress the importance of having AEL students included in all NC emergency notifications.

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Student Services, Financial Effectiveness, Leadership/Culture: Finding champions for this project will not be difficult, as it was abundantly apparent that AEL is extremely valued by Navarro College leadership. Site visitors met President Kevin Fegan, Vice President of Student Services Maryann Hailey, and Vice President of Academic Affairs Carol Hanes. President Fegan recognizes NC AEL as an important onramp

and a critical member of the College's Texas Pathways team. Leslie is included on most of the major internal committees of NC. She has also been asked by the president to present to NC's board of trustees on AEL's financial contribution to the college, including direct tuition payments, transition of AEL students to academic programs through the strong work of staff including Career Navigator Kelly Meeks, and providing some developmental education coursework.

Student Services, Leadership/Culture: President Fagen also recognizes that NC AEL is a strong ambassador and great resource to the local community. Leslie Hayes serves on numerous community boards and advisory committees. As a result, Navarro College and the Corsicana community look to NC AEL for solutions to some of the community's long standing challenges. One of these is to encourage and support the 50% of high school students who are often overlooked by High School Counselors and Advisers as post-secondary candidates and/or who need direct instruction on resumes, interviewing, and job success skills. NC and their local communities see this group as opportunity youth. Leslie and her team are working with community leaders to create a bridge program to college and career for these students. The ACC visitors shared their College Prep model as potential ideas for Navarro.

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Student Services, Financial Effectiveness: The ACC team benefitted from hearing about how NC AEL is integrating with NC Developmental Education and the co-requisite model for the non-algebraic strand. Their model saves NC students financial aid money as they move through the developmental education sequence, which in the long run will help NC students persist and complete academic degrees. The ACC AEL team plans to propose this model for ACC.

Student Services, Curriculum, Financial Effectiveness, Structure: NC's second request from TX-PMN for technical assistance was for ideas on providing IETs in areas beyond Healthcare. Since making this request, a few things have happened at NC that are naturally helping them with this effort. One is the recent hire of a Continuing Education Director at NC. Secondly, NC AEL had already made the decision to expand into offering academic IETs such as welding. Curriculum development for new IETs is already one of NC AEL's strengths, so as new training programs become available, the curriculum will be developed. NC AEL curriculum for IETs is something ACC now plans to use back in Austin.

Student Services, Curriculum, Instruction: The last area discussed was the challenge of obtaining academic MSGs for IETs. NC AEL is clearly going above and beyond to achieve gains with their students. For example, one student had achieved her industry recognized certificate but was struggling to make a gain on the TABE test — in spite of direct and comprehensive instruction for TABE success. The ACC team suggested reaching out to Navarro College's Student Accessibility Services to see if this student might qualify for extended time on the TABE test. While not be a solution for all students, in some cases it may be an option. MSGs for IETs is a challenge for all AEL programs since the primary goal of the IET is to pass the training portion section, and the basic skills portion is contextualized and in service to that goal. Sometimes the basic skills portion helps with the required academic AEL assessment and sometimes not. The ACC and NC AEL teams hope at some point this policy may be reviewed and revised.

Austin Community College site visitors greatly appreciated the wonderful opportunity to visit and learn more about AEL at Navarro College. Navarro College is doing great and innovative things. As mentioned throughout this report, ACC learned as much from NC as NC hopefully learned from them. ACC will continue to work with the NC AEL team on any future follow-up needed, via phone and/or visits.

Texas Peer Mentor
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*Note that this site visit addressed seven of the TX-PMN's Ten Tenets.

