

SANTIAGO: Chair Gabrieli, thanks so much for making time to come in for this meeting today. DHE has developed an exciting new tool for all the campuses and that will help show how Apple Lake Community College is doing.

GABRIELI: Absolutely! I've heard a lot about this thing and I'm looking forward to seeing it in action. And I just got the memo from the Commissioner the other day about annual presidential evaluations. It seems like the department is really putting an emphasis on hard data to measure success and challenges, so this will be very helpful.

SANTIAGO: You know Jonathan Keller, our Institutional Research Director here at Apple Lake, right? He'll be walking us through some of the key metrics and showing us comparisons to our peer institutions here in Massachusetts.

GABRIELI: Of course – good to see you again, Jonathan. Thanks for taking me through this.

KELLER: Let's start by looking at **completion of gateway courses**. These are the math and English classes that students need to take during their first year. We're doing well here. 29% of our full-time students get through these courses on time.

GABRIELI: 29% doesn't seem very high ...

KELLER: Well, this is comparable the rest of the community college segment at 28%. Being on par with the average, it's flagged as a medium priority for further investigation. Here's one important additional detail: we've come up 12 percentage points over the past six years.

GABRIELI: 12 percentage points? That's great! (turning to S) How did you do that?

SANTIAGO: [Talk about developmental education – three pronged approach: multiple measures, math pathways, co-requisite.]

KELLER: Overall, our trend across demographics has been positive. Rates have been rising dramatically for white, African-American, and Latinx students. Still, among the full-time students who entered Apple Lake in the fall of 2014-16, Latinx students are 13 percentage points behind white students.

GABRIELI: I like the fact that the trend line is going up, but the gaps are troubling.

SANTIAGO: I agree that the gap is not good – it's a top priority for me to address. Unfortunately, this is something we are seeing across higher education in Massachusetts. BHE has put a focus on closing gaps through the new equity framework, and this is something that I'll be putting a lot of focus on.

KELLER: Moving on to **on-time credit accumulation**. Research shows that students who enroll in enough credits to put them on track to graduate in a timely manner are more likely to do well than students who only take fewer classes. For full-time students, that means taking at least 24 credits in their first year; for part timers, that's 12 credits a year. We're doing well here – 31% of our students are hitting those marks compared with 28% for other community colleges. But here's the part that we can be really proud of: we're up 14 percentage points over the past 6 years.

GABRIELI: I like to hear that! What do you think you're doing that drove this up?

SANTIAGO: Guided pathways has been key for us here as well. Instead of just turning students loose on the course catalog, we are providing them with more direction around which classes they should sign up for and in what order to get the degree they are seeking. When they have this plan, we find that they are more likely to take more courses. scheduling has also been huge in getting this done. Our students have busy lives. Even the ones who are going full-time have other things going on – families, jobs, other stuff. If they have long blocks of time during the day between their classes, it makes it so much harder for them to balance their other obligations – such as finding and keeping a job, or arranging for reliable childcare. Instead, we're stacking the classes they need close together. Rather than having a two hour gap in the middle of the day, they're able to knock out their classes for the day one after the other.

GABRIELI: Do you have a breakdown of the data for racial and ethnic groups?

KELLER: Overall, rates have been rising dramatically for white, African American, and Latinx students. However, you can see here that Latinx students currently trail white students by 14 percentage points – 20% to 34%.

GABRIELI: This looks like a similar type of gap that we just saw with gateway courses.

SANTIAGO: It is. Like I said, these gaps are pervasive across the higher ed system and across a whole range of metrics. It speaks to the need for a holistic approach here at Apple Lake, but also in conjunction with all the other institutions in the system.

GABRIELI: Are there any community colleges in Massachusetts that are closing these gaps?

KELLER: None of the institutions here have closed the gaps per se, but Orange Mountain Community College has a fairly positive story to tell with their data. Here – let me show you some of their metrics. You can see our Latinx / white gaps are comparable to the segment, but at Orange Mountain, the lines are closer together – meaning smaller gaps.

GABRIELI: Have you spoken to their president recently? Do you know about anything that she is doing that might account for why they're doing better than us here?

SANTIAGO: That's definitely a conversation I can have – she's doing great work over there. They have implemented a number of initiatives specifically targeted at Latinx students that may be replicable here. We talk regularly and we both learn a lot from the other's experiences.

GABRIELI: OK, you're telling me all the places you're doing well for the most part. What about where you're behind? What area do you need to do better in?

KELLER: One area that's on our radar is **first year retention**. This looks at the number of full-time first year students who enrolled here at Apple Lake in the fall of 2017 came back in the fall of 2018. As you can see, this year we are behind the segmental average by 3 percentage points.

GABRIELI: It looks like we have been behind the segmental average fairly consistently over the past several years, right?

KELLER: Yes, although this year we started to gain on our segmental peers. One year isn't a trend, but we're hopeful.

GABRIELI: What's preventing us from driving this rate up?

SANTIAGO: Typically, community college enrollment is counter-cyclical to the economy. When the economy is doing well, our enrollment goes down because there are more employment opportunities and students leave to take on jobs. During a recession, more students stay. Still, we are trying to do more to keep our retention from declining. We're doubling down on advising. It's important that our advisors are helping students see the big picture. The job that they are leaving school for might be paying them \$15 an hour, but if they stay in school they may be able to have a career that will pay them \$1 million more over their lifetime. We've seen some success through that, but it's certainly something we're keeping a close eye on.

GABRIELI: What else should we cover?

KELLER: Another area where we have room to grow is in **six-year student success**. For first time freshmen who enrolled in the fall of 2011, 60.3% achieved a success outcome compared to 62.9% at other community colleges.

SANTIAGO: But is that a legitimate statistic for community colleges? A lot of our students end up transferring to Sweet Potato State University, which is located only a couple of miles from

us. That's a good thing, but don't we get penalized for them since they aren't graduating from Apple Lake?

KELLER: Well, the metric takes that into account. Success isn't just graduating – it includes all students who graduate, transfer, attain 30 credits, or who are still enrolled. So the students who come to Apple Lake and transfer to Sweet Potato count toward our success.

GABRIELI: Makes sense to me. But given that we are lagging behind the state segmental average, this sounds like an area for growth moving forward. What about outside of Massachusetts? Does this system look at national peers so we can see how we are stacking up?

KELLER: The system will do that. My colleagues at the other campuses and I are currently reviewing the national peers that were selected for us by a national expert. The goal was to select other institutions around the country that are similar in size, academic programs offered, and other institutional characteristics. Once we have finished vetting the national peers, DHE will use them for benchmarking wherever possible in these reports.

SANTIAGO: When we do get those national comparisons, we'll have an opportunity to look at some national best practices. One thing to consider is that six-year student success is closely related to the progress metrics that we talked about before – retention, gateway course completion, and credit accumulation. We've made significant progress in some of those areas, so there is a good chance that the next time we measure the six-year rate that we will see it improve.

GABRIELI: Given the connection between the first three metrics we discussed and the six-year success rate, I'm guessing that we are going to see the same white-Latinx gaps show up here as what we've been seeing earlier.

KELLER: Unfortunately, you're right. For students who entered Apple Lake in 2011, there is a large gap between white students and Latinx – 61% success for whites and 53% for Latinx. In fact, although the white success rate has remained pretty flat, the Latinx success rate has declined 3 percentage points.

GABRIELI: I know that we've only had a chance to talk about the student success metrics so far. What are the other areas that the tool looks at?

KELLER: We've got metrics for access, affordability, workforce, and fiscal stewardship. Access and affordability as well as student success are the areas with the most robust data right now. I'm hearing that workforce and fiscal stewardship will be rolled out next year.

GABRIELI: Let's cover those access and affordability metrics at a future meeting.

SANTIAGO: That's fine – we can set up something for early next week.

GABRIELI: Works for me. But this student success data has really given me a good picture of how we can use the tool. I think it's going to be really helpful as we work to measure how we're doing as an institution. The board's presidential evaluation committee is meeting in a couple of weeks. In addition to the criteria that we used on your evaluation last year, I want to incorporate these metrics. With DHE asking us to focus in on equity, this gives us a strong baseline to see how we're doing. Based on this conversation, I can certainly see a few things off the top of my head that we can point to as being positive indicators for Apple Lake. But we also need to look at our shortcomings. I'm going to recommend that we call out the six-year student success data and look for some measurable improvement next year. I'm hopeful that you're right that progress in the other metrics will lead toward progress in this area as well.

SANTIAGO: I can work with that. Like you suggested, I'll reach out to the president of Orange Mountain and see what she's done that we can do as well. We've had good success through cooperation in the past and this is a great opportunity to do that again.

GABRIELI: And the achievement gaps – those are troubling. The data is showing consistent and persistent daylight between white and Latinx students. I can see why the BHE established the equity framework. We've got to do something to close these.

SANTIAGO: I completely agree. I'm participating in broad discussions both across the Massachusetts system and here at Apple Lake. This is a top priority for me. Moving forward, this is going to be a large piece of what I provide to the board of trustees at their meetings. It's not an easy challenge to address, but one that we've got to take on. We need to be aware of how we are doing in this work as compared to our peers.

GABRIELI: Great! Jonathan – thank you so much for walking me through this. Looking forward seeing the data for the other metrics.

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