



Dr. Steven Ender  
President  
Grand Rapids Community College  
143 Bostwick Ave. NE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503-3295

Dear Dr. Ender:

We are thrilled to have Grand Rapids Community College as part of the Achieving the Dream National Reform Network (ATD) and are deeply appreciative of you and your colleagues' continued commitment to student success and equity. After reviewing your 2015 Annual Reflection and receiving input from your coaching team, we offer several observations in this letter about your institution's progress to date toward achieving the student success and equity goals identified by your team. We have arranged the review using the five broad principles that ATD views as key to institutional transformation, which also serve as the sections for your Principles Assessment Survey.

### Reflections on the Five Achieving the Dream Principles

#### *Committed Leadership*

- We commend you for your strong presidential support of the college's student success agenda and for the increasingly broad support from the senior administration.
- It is admirable that the college's leadership team has empowered members of the ATD core and strategy teams to provide leadership for the college's student success work. These teams are experiencing great success with their efforts to improve student success at the college.
- Similar to other institutions, engaging mid-level administrators in the ongoing student success work at the college can be a challenge. We encourage you to continue building leadership development opportunities for mid-level administrators so that they can contribute more fully to the students success work at the college.

#### *Use of Evidence to Improve Policies, Programs, and Services*

- We commend the institutional research office for its level of respect across campus and for providing adequate data for the college to enhance decision making and improve practice.
- Furthermore, Blackboard Analytics is a great addition to the college's data analytics tools and allows for quicker data extraction.

- Despite some residual backlog of more complicated data not yet available in Blackboard Analytics, we encourage the college to continue to provide student success data to broad groups of faculty and staff.

### *Broad Engagement*

- Over the years, the college has made considerable progress with its efforts to engage more faculty beyond developmental education in the student success work. We applaud the college for continuing to grow the engagement of key stakeholder groups in the ATD strategy teams.
- It is also noteworthy that the college's communication efforts continue to advance, especially the Retention Matters newsletter which provides an excellent avenue for increasing awareness of retention issues at the college.
- As with many institutions, engaging part-time faculty continues to be a challenge, and we encourage the college to expand opportunities for part-time faculty to join critical college success teams.

### *Systemic Institutional Improvement*

- We commend the college for beginning to address critical issues in student success such as developmental education, equity, and effective advising. These efforts are showing results in improved passing rates in both developmental English and math.
- We are happy to see that the college's student success measures are improving, showing that the college's ATD strategies are working. We applaud the college for integrating ATD principles into the college's ongoing strategic planning processes.
- While the college's innovations within developmental education are exciting and productive, we encourage the college to take measures to ensure that the faculty in those areas do not feel "innovation overload." One strategy to consider could be ensuring that innovations are clearly linked to the college's mission and student success priorities.

### *Equity*

- We commend the college for the developmental education reforms that are helping underserved populations make improvement in course success rates. While achievement gaps still exist, they are beginning to close.
- Recent college surveys show that most faculty, staff, and students perceive that the campus climate reflects attitudes of respect and inclusiveness. In addition to continuing the important work of addressing the needs of students of color, we encourage the college to also attend to the needs of LGBT students.

One possible next step for the college is to expand stakeholder input by collecting qualitative data from focus groups with different populations of students to get a deeper sense of the student's perspective than can be gleaned from a survey.

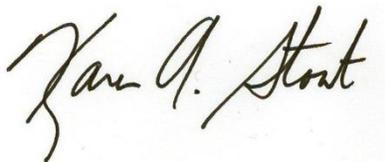
### Final Thoughts

Grand Rapids has always been a strong and high-performing college. Over the last year you have adopted several programs that have improved success in developmental education and allowed many students to bypass developmental education altogether and improve retention.

ATD is continuously building upon the institutional change lessons learned from our network over the last ten years and, as a result, we have recently released the next iteration of our institutional-change framework. This framework identifies seven core capacity areas essential to growing colleges' abilities to impact student outcomes through systemic and sustainable practices. In the next year, ATD plans to release a new suite of tools and other resources to undergird colleges' implementation of and maturation in the core capacity areas. We urge you to make the most of the new framework and resources as you take your student success work to the next level.

We appreciate the hard work, time, and resources that your institution devotes to your Achieving the Dream efforts. We encourage you to discuss the feedback in this letter with your Leadership Coach and Data Coach, who are ready to support and guide you moving forward as it may assist you in shaping the direction of your ongoing student success efforts. We look forward to working with you in the coming year and welcome your questions and comments along the way.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen A. Stout". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Dr. Karen A. Stout  
President & CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cindy Lenhart". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

Cindy Lenhart  
Vice President for Community College Relations