ONE POWERFUL VOICE

USING DATA *and* EVIDENCE *to* DRIVE STRATEGY *for* STUDENT SUCCESS

JFF

At one early college high school in May, students eagerly waited to walk across the stage at graduation. In their remarks, the district superintendent and the college president showered graduates with congratulatory praise, but their remarks included a contradiction. In addition to earning a high school diploma, many students also earned associate degrees; however, there was an almost 15% difference in the number of students that were reported by each administrator.

WHY MIGHT the DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT and the COLLEGE PRESIDENT REPORT DIFFERENT NUMBERS of STUDENTS EARNING ASSOCIATE DEGREES?
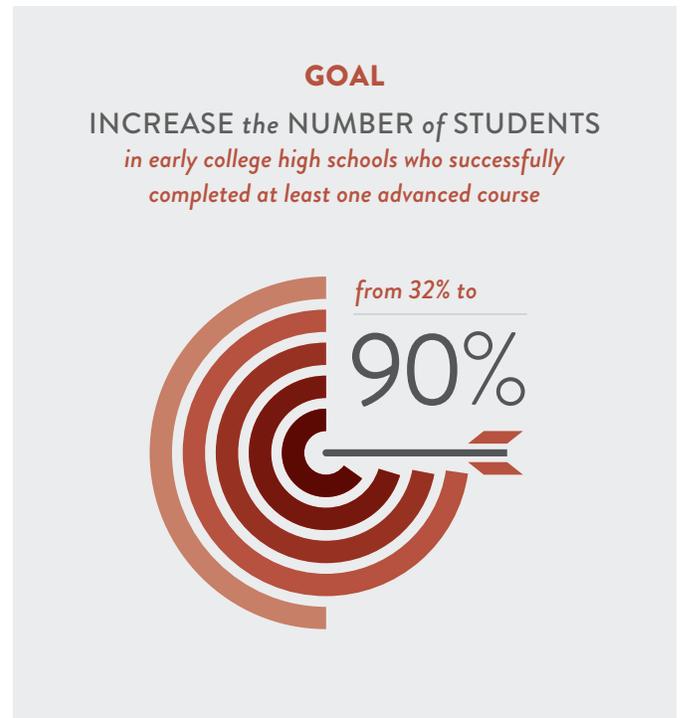
THE CHALLENGE ▗

In 2012, Educate Texas, in partnership with Jobs for the Future (JFF), committed in earnest to a five-year, multi-district Investing in Innovation Early College Expansion Partnership (i3 ECEP) grant. This effort strove to increase the number of students in participating early college high schools who successfully completed at least one advanced course from the initial 32% to a lofty 90%, with many going on to earn associate degrees. Increasing this number would not only enhance the high school experience for students, but it would also impact college readiness, graduation rates, college success and student lifetime earning potential. Stakeholders understood the need for data-driven strategies to grow the number of students meeting this goal.

Educate Texas immediately requested high-level data associated with the advanced course-taking goal from both the school districts and the partner institutions of higher education. These data reflected the progress students were making towards completion of advanced courses through an accounting of students who had enrolled in dual credit courses, earned dual credit, tested for college placement through the Texas Success Initiative (TSI), met standards for college placement (TSI) and enrolled in Advanced Placement courses.

Data accuracy was critical to identify phenomena at the K-12 and postsecondary levels that were helping or hindering student success. However, it was clear in the early stages of this endeavor that a deepened partnership was required to increase the quality of peer interactions with data as a central focus. The partners needed to redefine their working relationships to establish a culture of systems design and data sharing that would facilitate aligned and clear communication. As demonstrated in the opening vignette, one example of miscommunication involved the number of students earning associate degrees and a lack of clarity regarding which

GOAL

INCREASE *the* NUMBER *of* STUDENTS
*in early college high schools who successfully
completed at least one advanced course*

from 32% to
90%

institution claimed the correct statistic. Although the college provided a snapshot of students enrolled in dual credit courses, the district held the most current student enrollment data, leading to the discrepancy.

To determine proximity to the goal of 90% advanced course completion, school, district and higher education partners needed to identify how many high school students had completed college courses, not how many students were currently enrolled in classes at the beginning of a semester. As the colleges and districts continued to report data, they realized that they did not share a common language for the different types of data needed to monitor student progress. Furthermore, missing voices from individuals such as principals, district data staff and/or early college liaisons hindered accurate and productive data conversations.

SOLUTIONS

Educate Texas, the school districts and higher education partners strengthened their shared language and understanding of data by commissioning a joint task force with a mandate to develop and implement several strategies to streamline the use of available data. Some data had not been collected by either partner, and strategies were employed to harvest new information. In brief, the task force developed a common data language, negotiated data sharing practices and facilitated connections among the goals and current data reports.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Educate Texas facilitated data workshops that helped to build the capacity of college and district staffs to converse about information in ways that allowed for easier tracking of longitudinal data and improved program management. These conversations enhanced how staff members used data to guide program refinement and impact.

Data workshops helped key staff members develop processes for validating student records, determine the cadence and frequency for sharing data and identify data owners.

COMMON LANGUAGE

One immediate goal of the data workshops was the development of common data language. Once the group clarified common data language, the data were properly categorized so that the districts, colleges and Educate Texas reached a shared understanding of all data that were being requested and reported.

Districts and their partnering colleges created informal data dictionaries to identify and define standardized metrics for high-level student data, such as students eligible for dual credit courses and those who earned associate degrees.

DATA TOOLS

The development of data tools contributed to an ease of reporting and elevated the visibility of successes and challenges within the early college high school program. Real time dashboards allowed for more accurate student intervention or acceleration to guide students toward maximizing their potential.

Data tools included collection templates and process maps for advanced course completion.

DATA TOOLS
were shared across institutions and facilitated the

IDENTIFICATION + COLLECTION + ORGANIZATION

*of data in an easily accessible format*

COMMITMENT

The data workshops strengthened the partnerships between institutions as each articulated a shared commitment to student success. This commitment included a willingness to invest in synthesizing the needed data to drive strategy. Once the partners began to track appropriate data, they developed new strategies to support students who had taken and met the TSI standards but had not enrolled in dual credit courses. Principals aided this process by identifying where data were missing or misrepresented in existing reports and supported the team efforts to validate data.

Stakeholders articulated a shared vision about how to utilize clear data and developed strategies based on transparency. One example? Increase the number of students taking Advanced Placement and dual credit courses in participating high schools by identifying and counseling those who have been successful on the TSI and have not previously been enrolled.

STUDENTS ENROLLED *in* AP/DC
(Advanced Placement/Dual Credit)

767 — 2015

1044 — 2017
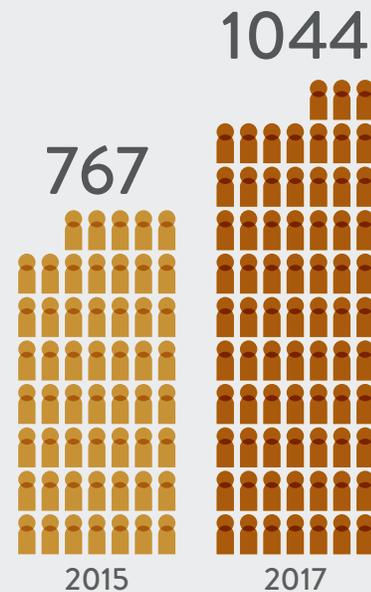
These data are relevant for the class of 2017.

SUSTAINABILITY

Educate Texas, the districts and colleges developed processes that effectively and efficiently contributed to data reporting across the early college high schools. The team designed tools to be modified and adjusted to adapt to the context of future district and college partnerships. Remaining mindful of partners' contexts will continue to drive the innovation needed to sustain data collection, analysis and reporting processes for future cohorts of students.
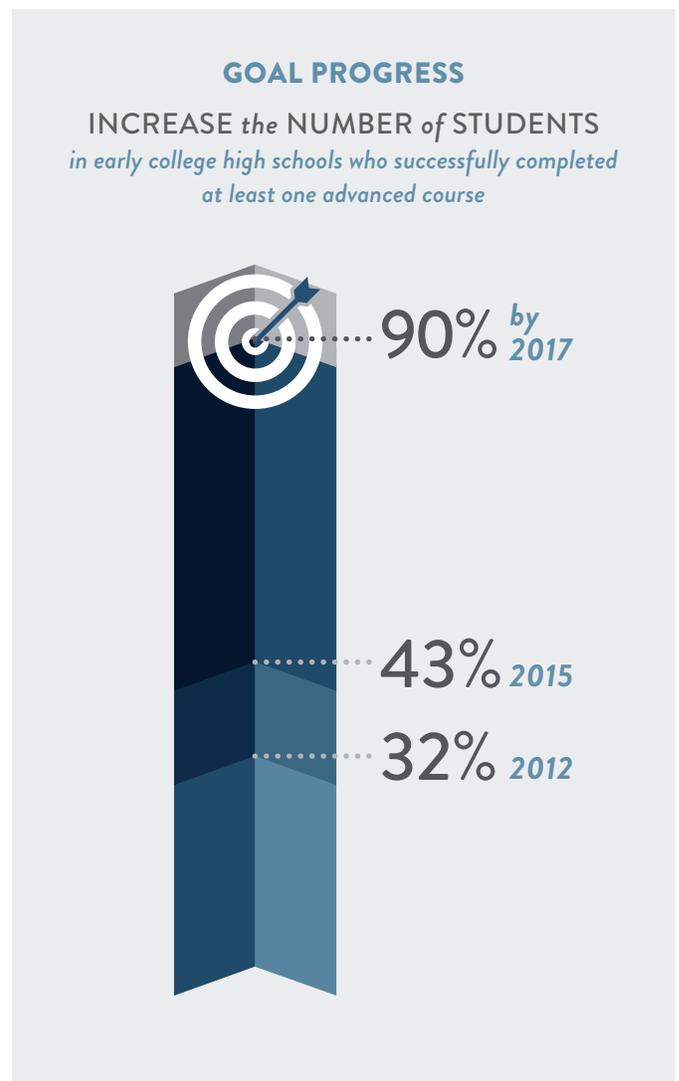
Information Technology staff and analytics stakeholders engaged in unpacking data at the district level by analyzing data dashboards that tracked TSI completion and advanced course attainment across all schools.

IMPACT

So, what caused the superintendent and college president to report incongruent data during graduation? The college president correctly reported the number of students with earned associate degrees. While the college reported students with conferred degrees, the district reported both earned and anticipated degrees of those students who were enrolled in summer school. In this case, the college claimed the correct statistic.

Because Educate Texas collected timely data on student progress and helped to improve data conversations between districts and colleges, school and district leaders could precisely intervene to increase the numbers of students eligible to access college courses. Additionally, these data supported the partnerships to determine accurate numbers of students successfully completing advanced high school courses, earning dual credit and associate degrees. Within three short years, the percentage of students had increased from 32% to 43%, demonstrating progress towards the 90% goal.

Unlocking data around successful college entrance assessments, enrollment and course success is the first step in bolstering the school to workforce pipeline. The next step involves understanding when students are completing degrees and becoming gainfully employed. Breaking down silos between institutions of higher education and the workforce will support students in lifelong success and economic competitiveness. When school districts, institutions of higher education and the workforce can articulate the progress and success of students and graduates with one powerful voice, they can develop strategies to ensure optimal student outcomes. The next phase pushes beyond the original goal of students earning advanced high school course credits and associate degrees to identifying the high-impact roles that students are taking in the workplace.

GOAL PROGRESS

INCREASE *the* NUMBER *of* STUDENTS
in early college high schools who successfully completed at least one advanced course

90% *by 2017*

43% *2015*

32% *2012*

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Which key people should discuss student data from your district and partnering college?

Do the district and college use common language when reporting data?

Have the partners come to consensus with data sharing processes?

What tools are already available to help improve the clarity and visibility of student data?

How will all partners use data to improve student outcomes?

Educate Texas is a public-private initiative of Communities Foundation of Texas that works to strengthen the public and higher education system in Texas so that every student is prepared for and succeeds in school, in the workforce and in life. For over a decade, Educate Texas has helped guide schools, districts and higher education institutions through the process of designing early college schools, implementing effective governance structures and strengthening instruction and student support. Educate Texas has supported the districtwide implementation of early college in Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District (PSJA ISD) since 2008. As part of the Early College Expansion Partnership, Educate Texas has played a central role in technical assistance and instructional coaching in PSJA ISD and Brownsville ISD.

JFF

Jobs for the Future (JFF) has played a leading role in launching and shaping early colleges nationwide since 2002, when it became coordinator of the Early College High School Initiative, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. More recently, JFF and partners have focused on adapting early college designs to new contexts and on informing state and federal policies to bring high-quality dual enrollment and early college opportunities to more students. In the ECEP districts, JFF has provided strategic advising to central office staff along with leadership coaching for principals and instructional coaching for teachers.

This topic briefing is the first of a four-part series created by Educate Texas to disseminate lessons learned from the Early College Expansion Partnership. For more information, visit edtx.org.

DALLAS

5500 CARUTH HAVEN LANE
DALLAS, TX 75225-8146
214.750.4222

AUSTIN

1303 SAN ANTONIO STREET
SUITE 830
AUSTIN, TX 78701
737.708.8150

RIO GRANDE VALLEY

407 N. 77 SUNSHINE STRIP
HARLINGEN, TX 78550