

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Des Moines Area Community College

Project Details			
Title	Early Alert Referral (EAR) Program Phase Two	Status	ACTIVE
Category	1 - Helping Students Learn	Updated	
Timeline		Reviewed	
Planned Project Kickoff	09-01-2015	Created	11-18-2014
Target Completion	09-01-2016	Version	2

1: PROJECT SUMMARY

A: The second phase of the EAR Action Project is a continuation of the original which was designed to refine the voluntary referral/support system and connect with students identified as high risk in their academic persistence. The EAR is proactive advising management system that connects students to appropriate student support services e.g. academic advisors, counselors, financial aid specialists, Academic Achievement Center resources, etc, earlier in the term where intervention is most successful. Phase Two of the Action Project will be looking at District-wide implementation, sustainability and benchmarking.

2: PROJECT RATIONALE

A: At write up the initial Action Project was considered to be completed by DMAACC. The Reviewer felt that it was more 'nearing completion' based on next steps. After reviewing the updated feedback DMAACC realized that there was value in continuing the action project into the next year in order to provide additional support through collecting benchmark data, as well as monitoring sustainability pitfalls, and institutionalizing the new protocols.

The culture at each campus location is distinct and the initial Action Project provided insight on granting local control over some aspects of the process is helpful while still prioritizing a district-wide commitment to consistency. Reviewing campus specific challenges and maintaining quality control across the district will remain a top priority as the process gains further traction. Additional data will be captured to identify referrals by campus in order to monitor the participation.

3: PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES

A: As the original Action Project focused on a specific cohort of students, going college-wide this year, the actual numbers will increase and bench-marking data can be collected. In the cohort terms for piloting, 672 students were served in the fall 2014 term and 480 students were served in the spring 2015 term. As a measure for study in this benchmark year, both numbers and percentages will be calculated.

- Data on number and percentage of students referred,
- Tracking of students completing 67% of attempted credits,
- Tracking of students Cumulative GPA of =>2.0, as well as
- Earned awards,

will be collected on a semester basis after the completion of the fall 2015 semester as well as the spring 2016 semester.

It is expected that all six campuses will actively participate. Additional data will be captured to identify referrals by campus, by term, in order to monitor the participation.

The data will be collected and analyzed following each semester and adjustments in protocols will be determined over the summer of 2016.

4: INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

A: The Early Alert Referral Program is based in Student Services. Leadership is provided by the Executive Dean of Student Services and a lead Academic Advisor dedicated to the coordination and implementation of this project. Faculty, along with advising/counseling staff on the campuses, and Academic Achievement Center staff will be involved in the Action Project. District Chairs, Academic Deans, and

Provosts will participate in the monitoring and follow-up to ensure that the protocols continue to be implemented consistently and correctly for the duration as well as institutionalization at project end. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness is providing student data on retention, success and persistence to support monitoring of the effectiveness of the protocols.

Once a student is identified through the Early Alert Referral (EAR) process, the project administrator assigns him or her to an advisor/counselor/navigator depending upon the nature of the referral. The assigned advisor/counselor/navigator has 48 hours in which to follow-up with the student, through phone call, email or face-to-face contact. The assigned staff member is required to contact the student a minimum of three attempted calls or three attempted emails before they report the outcome of their contact. In addition, the assigned staff member then records the outcome of the outreach efforts and any follow-up interactions into the DMACC administrative information system (Banner). The Banner Form used for this tracking is SWATRAK. This step is done so that other staff members working with the student could see if an EAR had been made and any related notes regarding that referral.

Students using Academic Achievement Center/Tutoring Services are tracked using an electronic sign in/out system. This tracking included times of usage and services utilized.

5: PROJECT CONTROL

A: The decision to implement the EAR process as a districtwide initiative resulted in a broader impact than just the initial at-risk cohort population that was tracked for the purposes of the grant. As this is a transitional year, both numbers and percentages will be calculated for study. The following metrics will be measured for both fall and spring terms:

- Number of students identified and referred during fall 2015 and spring 2016
- Number and percentage of identified students who completed 67% or more of their attempted credits during the term
- Number and percentage of identified students who earned a cumulative 2.0 GPA or better during the term
- Number and percentage of identified students who earned an award at the end of the term
- Referrals by campus by term in order to monitor the participation.

Once contacted, students very rarely referred to concerns related to financial difficulties and challenges related to career/major indecision. (Research indicates that these are two reasons why students fail to succeed academically.) More often than not the students talked about 'life situations' that were preventing them from either attending classes or doing well. For continuous improvement, outreach contact for each identified student will be monitored to identify types of contact and identified student needs.

6: ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS

A: This Action Project is following a "learn and adapt" methodology that should forestall most challenges as all participants/providers are being brought to the table to develop it. The major challenge would be the costs involved in the increased demand for services. The EAR initiative does not have the support of outside funding for this upcoming year. It will be important to track the established processes of EAR in order to monitor the potential pitfalls in sustaining the outreach without the backing of additional funding. The President and Cabinet are very involved in the monitoring of this project and fully supportive of the initiative.

7: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A: During listening sessions, faculty and staff identified a key element of the process. The process is designed for faculty members to provide the initial outreach to the student. When this conversation takes place and the student is aware that a referral will be submitted, the likelihood of a successful communication with a staff member increases. When students are contacted without the knowledge that a referral was submitted, the likelihood of a defensive attitude increases. Stressing that the process is an additional layer of support (and not the first or only layer) will be an increased area of focus during the 2015-2016 training sessions.