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GTCC GETS \$25,000 PRIZE AFTER WINNING NATIONAL AUSTIN LEADERSHIP AWARD

CHARLOTTE -- Guilford Technical Community College has been awarded the national Leah Meyer Austin Institutional Leadership Award for the school's initiative to help students from low-income families and students of color succeed.

The award was presented Tuesday (Feb. 2) during the annual Achieving the Dream Strategy Institute in Charlotte. GTCC became only the second school to win the award, and the \$25,000 that goes with it. Valencia Community College in Orlando, Fla., won the inaugural award last year.

GTCC President Don Cameron accepted the award. "This prestigious award recognizes the total commitment by GTCC's students, faculty and staff to establish our institution as a valid 'learner centered college,'" Cameron said. "We have achieved this through a data-driven program by focusing on retention through tutoring to help our students create success and achieve their dreams," he said.

Trustees' chairperson Shirley Frye said, "This award underscores the concerted effort GTCC is making to insure that every student who needs help with coursework gets targeted guidance and support."

GTCC also was recognized as one of 21 community colleges in the nation designated as "Leader Colleges" for commitment and progress in the Achieving the Dream principles.

Lumina Foundation for Education in Indianapolis created the award in honor of Austin, a former senior vice-president of the organization. Her visionary leadership helped shape the national Achieving the Dream program, an initiative founded in 2004 to help more community college students succeed.

Retired GTCC vice-president Kathryn Baker Smith provided crucial leadership in the school's involvement in Achieving the Dream for five years. Smith said the participation of Cameron, Frye and trustee David Miller in the ATD project was a "significant first step in changing the college culture. Their presence let people know that Achieving the Dream was important to the leadership of the college."

Evaluators of the GTCC program from the American Association of Community Colleges in Washington agreed with Cameron that the college's participation in the Achieving the Dream program "helped us make tremendous changes in the culture of our college."

Cameron said, "There has never been an initiative that has produced more meaningful involvement of the total community."

The evaluators noted, "Most of its numerous strategic interventions – ranging from a supplemental instruction program for developmental education students to a revamped orientation and streamlined intake process for (developmental education) first-year students – have been implemented and evaluated over time. Furthermore, several strategies have been scaled up based on promising student outcomes to reach increasing numbers of students."

"The Guilford Technical Community College leadership, faculty, staff and students have revolutionized the culture of the school," said Dr. William Trueheart, CEO of Achieving the Dream.

Plans are for ATD to become a non-profit agency apart from Lumina, and it will temporarily have headquarters in Chapel Hill along with MDC Inc., which has been managing partner of the \$100 million organization since its inception. MDC has overseen Achieving the Dream's expansion to more than 100 institutions in 22 states, serving more than a million students.

Trueheart termed GTCC receiving the award “truly a lesson in the power of high-level commitment and well-focused, evidence-based decision making.”

Focus on Student Success (Box or sidebar)

Evaluators have found GTCC has put its focus squarely on identifying effective programs and processes that will lead directly to student success, particularly among higher risk, developmental education students.

The college piloted 15 projects, 11 of which continue today. One of the most productive programs has been GTCC’s reorganized orientation process. The new Student Orientation Advisement and Registration (SOAR) program has enhanced the original one-hour orientation seminar to a more comprehensive three-hour orientation that includes the addition of advising and registration support.

The college also is scaling up pre-placement refresher courses, intensive advisement of entering developmental education students, and case management services for higher-risk developmental education students.

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