

## **New Admissions Strategies Aim to Reduce the Achievement Gap**

As local and national demographics change, the Office of Admissions & Student Recruitment is changing too.

Census data show the U.S. population is increasingly becoming “minority majority.” At the same time, the number of students graduating from high school nationwide is dropping, as the population of that particular age group declines.

And yet, there is a well-documented “achievement gap” among first-generation, low-income and minority college students. They are not attending college in numbers as high as their white and Asian counterparts.

To address these issues, last fall Middlesex created a new Admissions position: Director of Diversity Outreach & Recruitment. Jeffrey Tejada, a nine-year veteran of MCC’s Admissions Office, has been hired to fill that role. As Director of Diversity Outreach & Recruitment, Jeffrey is responsible for the development and implementation of strategies and programs designed to recruit, enroll and retain these populations, while working with other departments at the college who focus on these same populations.

For Tejada, taking on this new assignment was an opportunity to focus on a newly identified need. Since 2012, the number of Latino students attending MCC has grown from 12 percent to 17 percent, he said. Latino students are now the largest minority group attending the college, and MCC’s overall student body is now 38 percent minority.

“What we’re finding is there is an information gap within the achievement gap,” said Tejada. “Our low-income, minority and first-generation students don’t always know what steps they have to take to get to the finish line – which is enrolling at Middlesex.”

Tejada has come up with a new strategy to bring high school students directly to the college. This past fall, he organized the Pathway to Success Day event in collaboration with Greater Lowell and Lawrence High School along with the Lowell Middlesex Academy Charter School.

Thanks to a \$2,000 grant sponsored by the NEACAC-Make a Difference Fund, in early December over 100 senior students from those three regional high schools were bused to the MCC-Lowell campus for this feature “college for a day” admissions recruitment event. “It’s a fun day, the students are given free MCC t-shirts and other giveaways, tour our campus, sit-in on our classes, apply to the college, book their testing appointments and hear directly from our current MCC students as to why Middlesex was the right choice for them. We feel that the Pathway event provides us with a unique platform to help the college showcase all of the social, leadership, academic and financial opportunities and benefits available to students at Middlesex Community College. They get a great sense for the student experience here at Middlesex – and see faces that look like theirs,” he explained.

If successful, the Pathway to Success Day will be permanently incorporated into the department's recruitment model, Tejada explained, joining other MCC-supported programs.

"I faced similar challenges to those our current students are confronted with," he said. "My parents didn't go to college, but I had an older brother who did, so I leaned on him. Our students need to find the advocates in their lives who can help steer them on the path to college." "A lot of these students' parents are new to the U.S., and they don't always speak much English or know how to navigate through the college enrollment process. Often times, the most these parents can do is to say to their kids, 'I want you to go to college but it's up to you to get there.' But that's a lot for an 18-year-old to handle.

"They have to finish high school, many are working part-time jobs to help their families financially, others are responsible for taking care of their younger siblings at home after school because their parents are working second shift— I did. Then they have to take their SATs and CPTs, and figure out all those deadlines," added Tejada.

"It's a lot. So we designed the Pathway to Success Day to help our students get one step closer toward achieving their education goals."

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