

Benchmark 1: Target Population

Hosted by:

Dr. Kimberly Woodson, Early College High School Project Coordinator
Education Service Center Region 13

Special Guests:

Dr. Janice Lombardi, Principal
Trini Garza Early College High School, Dallas ISD

Dr. Tracie S. Rodriguez, Principal
Collegiate High School and Branch Academy, Corpus Christi ISD

Kimberly Woodson: Benchmark 1 Target Populations. We're going to talk about how each of you work to meet the needs of your campus or the target population that it's specifically designed for. So using benchmark number 1 Target Populations, how do you do that?

Janice Lombardi: The first thing we do is contact the middle school counselors. We invite counselors over to the middle school for breakfast so we can inform them about what we do.

Initially, as a brand-new early college, we had to struggle to get our 100 students. We worked on just getting the counselors to refer them. Then after that, we worked through the community. Now we have up to 600 applicants for 100 spots, because of community empowerment. The community now knows the grassroots efforts of the other students in telling about our school.

Those things have worked. Our website, and all of the community outreach activities and LULAC and the NAACP, all of those community project members have helped us to enlist first-time college goers, we're at over 80%, with low socioeconomic at 87%.

We have a weighted lottery. The weighted lottery gives points for those who are low socioeconomic and also first-time college goers.

Kimberly Woodson: Wonderful. Tracie, how do you go about recruiting and making sure that your campus serves the target population?

Tracie Rodriguez: As Janice stated, we start with the middle schools. In addition to that, now that we've been open for a while, it becomes a little bit easier because students then can tell their message.

When we go out to the middle schools, we take student testimonials, alumni from that middle school, and they speak about it all. They're living it. They're breathing it. They're experiencing it.

And they share. And students are typically more in tune, they want to hear about the life of a student rather than an adult sharing what it's about. In addition to that, we've also provided our current students opportunities to nominate other friends, neighbors, and/or siblings that they feel would benefit from the school.

I think it's real important that early colleges target the at-risk population. Typically, it was designed for potential dropouts. Students that we would not normally have seen with attendance problems, we look

at those. Students that have disciplinary issues, we would look at those students. Because what those pieces of information tell us is a student needs a different experience. We really want middle schools to look at the needs of students. And from those needs, assess whether they would be more successful in a place that's just going to function differently.

Really look deeply, not at the surface, not at the most talented student or the student that has the all A's, we're really wanting to look at a student that has the biggest need, but with the greatest potential and motivated to what it is they would like to pursue. It takes a lot of time. Like Tracie said, we depend on the counselors because they know the students firsthand. We want to be sure that the students who need these schools the most are the ones that are going to be serviced as a priority.

Kimberly Woodson: Excellent. Great points to suggest. What about communicating these expectations with all of your stakeholders? With such a waiting list and as far as trying to meet the target population, how do you communicate with all of your stakeholders the intentions of the blueprint, as well as your recruitment and enrollment or lottery process that you have at your campus?

Tracie Rodriguez: You need to start with some sort of awareness campaign, both internally and externally. People who have no knowledge of early college won't have a good sense of what happens there. And so with student testimonials it's a lot easier. If you're a startup, it's going to be a little bit more challenging.

You're going to have to have the marketing materials, you're going to have to have the ins and outs. You'll need to prepare for the parents that are not always the most positive, and prepare for critics.

At the same time, be celebratory in what it is that you're wanting to attain, or going to attain, or have attained. There is a lot of balance that needs to be provided as you market your school and at the same time, results will speak for themselves.

Kimberly Woodson: Absolutely. Janice?

Janice Lombardi: I agree with everything that Tracie's just said. I think you do have to market quite a bit. The first point of contact is the middle school and the middle school counselors.

And we ask them to actually target some of those identified students and send them our way. Then they may come to our campus to shadow a current student and get a feel for the campus. Generally speaking, when that happens, we assign them a buddy for the day. And those kinds of person-to-person contacts are what really works in terms of getting them there. The thing that we also do is with all of the applicants we get, we interview for tenacity. We have questions that have to do with, "Does the student really want to be there or do the parents want them to be there?" It never works if the parents want them to be there, but the student doesn't want it-- they want to play football or they want to be in the band.

We have to make sure that they are a good fit for the school. And if they're not, then they will be successful somewhere else. But we try to interview for tenacity. Not for academics, not for attendance, not for all of those other hard skills that you would look at for, say, in a magnet program, but we do look for tenacity and interest.

Kimberly Woodson: What a great way to describe it. Tenacity. Completing a four-year plan, that's tenacity.

Tracie Rodriguez: And with resilience.

Kimberly Woodson: Tenacity and resilience. I like that. Ladies, thank you so much for sharing your information in regards to how each of your campuses are successful at addressing the needs of your students by meeting Benchmark 1 Target Population. Thank you.