Abstract

African Americans are 44% of the more than 10,000 students at West Los Angeles College (West), an urban community college in Los Angeles. In West’s service area, Los Angeles County’s Service Planning Area 5, only 14% of the adult population have a BA and in our neighboring Service Planning Area from which the college also draws, on 3% of the population has a BA degree. Further, 31% and 44% of Service Planning Area 5 and 6 residents subsist on household incomes below the federal poverty level.

Low success rates, few students taking math/English assessment, delayed enrollment in foundation skills classes, and low placements in math/English inescapably result in low graduation rates for African American students and indicate the need for significant improvements in how the college engages with African American students at West and in our feeder middle and high schools.

The goal of LEARN—Leading and Energizing African American students to Research and Knowledge—is to increase the recruitment, retention, transfer, and success rate of African American students by increasing skill development and college knowledge. One of the strengths of LEARN is that it is designed to augment current programs and activities—TRiO, EOP&S, Transfer, UMOJA, tutoring, Learning Center—while also introducing innovative new components based on success models at other institutions—research on how African American students learn, a faculty learning community, Discovery Days, and a highly supportive Learning Community featuring a unique reading and linguistics discovery module.

LEARN will work with middle and high school students, parents, and feeder school personnel to strengthen the college going culture. It will strengthen current programs at West, introducing sustainable models that will be institutionalized as federal funding ends.

LEARN’s seven key outcomes are to increase the number of African American (1) high school students who enroll at West or other colleges, (2) students who take the math/English assessment exam, (3) students who pass basic skills math and English, (4) students who pass college level math and English, (5) students who declare a major and follow a curriculum map, (6) students who earn certificates or degrees, and (7) students who transfer.