

# Democracy's College, Episode 69

## Piloting and Scaling Strategies to Reduce DFWs in Community Colleges

With guest Avis Proctor and host OiYan Poon

**Sal Nudo:** Welcome to the Democracy's College podcast series. This podcast focuses on educational equity, justice, and excellence for all students in the P-20 educational pathways. This podcast is a product of the Office of Community College Research and Leadership, or OCCRL, at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Learn more about OCCRL at [occrll.illinois.edu](http://occrll.illinois.edu).

In this episode, Dr. OiYan Poon, an author, speaker, and race and education scholar, talks with Harper College President Avis Proctor about how her institution is strategically organizing campus efforts to reduce the rates of D and F grades and course withdrawals, especially in gateway courses, by engaging in actionable institutional research and data.

**OiYan Poon:** Welcome to Illinois SUCCESS. I'm your host, OiYan Poon.

I'm excited to introduce our guest today. Dr. Avis Proctor is president of William Rainey Harper College. She has more than 30 years of experience, and may I say you do not look a day over 45. [Avis Proctor laughs] Thirty years of experience working in multicultural environments as an innovative mathematics educator and academic administrator with a focus on teaching, service, and research. As a higher education scholar and an Aspen Presidential Fellow, she contributes to the professional discourse, from local to global levels, on progressive leadership in higher education, research-based instructional strategies, strategic community engagement, economic development, and the STEM pipeline for underrepresented groups.

In this episode, we'll be exploring how institutional leaders can strategically organize campus efforts to reduce rates of D and F grades and course withdrawals, or DFW rates, especially in gateway courses, by engaging in actionable institutional research and data.

*This is going to be an illuminating conversation. I'm so excited. Welcome and thank you for joining me, Dr. Proctor.*

**Avis Proctor:** Thank you. My pleasure to be here.

**OiYan Poon:** So in conversations about student retention and completion, there are a lot of factors that shape institutional trends and outcomes. And one of these factors is the rates

at which students successfully complete introductory coursework, setting them up for their advanced coursework and completion. We know that on many campuses, there are patterns of unequal rates of gateway course completion. Can you share about Harper College's experiences with DFW rates and the new student success model currently under development?

**Avis Proctor:** Sure. About 10 years ago, Harper launched the Zero to 15 Course Initiative, focused on courses with *high* volume of students, high enrollment, and *lower* than average course success. Success is defined as students earning a C or better in a course. It's for those courses that are commonly taken in the first 15 credits at Harper, thus the title Zero to 15. The DFW rate being more than 30% is what would put a course on this list. And for us to have strategic interventions to reduce the DFW rates and increase success rates for students.

We are proud to share that our gateway course completion and credit momentum, we're starting to see substantial gains with our gateway English completion moving from 72% to 76%. Math, from 55% success to 69%, incredible momentum moving from 46% to 55%. And looking at our fall-to-fall retention rates, they've increased for *all* student groups. And so, with this intentional focus on where we have a high volume of students and lower success rates, that's how we are able to significantly improve success for students.

**OiYan Poon:** So it's kind of like an early-alert system for different courses, it sounded like.

**Avis Proctor:** For the *institution* to pay attention to, yes.

**OiYan Poon:** Yes.

**Avis Proctor:** Yes.

**OiYan Poon:** That's right.

**Avis Proctor:** Again, where you have *a lot* of students, so if you're able to improve success for a *good* critical mass of students, you have a higher chance of those percentage points moving. When you have *thousands* of students that you're working with, right, then it's *hard* to *move* the numbers and move that needle on student success. It's an *all-hands-on-deck* effort in terms of, okay, what are these courses? We have to have at least 300 students in those particular course sections. Again, DFW rate being more than 30%. And so, we look at actually getting courses off of that list, too. And so, we do have a good look at that every couple of years that we look, okay, what courses should we be taking off the list? Did we get the DFW rates less than 30%? We have some that we can point to that we've taken off the list because of this work.

**OiYan Poon:** So then taking *off* courses from this list, do you see that as examples of success? Are there other indicators for success and using data to figure that out?

**Avis Proctor:** Because of how we've defined what gets on the zero to 15 course list, if they have the DFW rate that falls below 30%, right away, that would take them off the list. So psychology, for example, having a DFW rate at 20%, roughly, now is off the list, although it was on before because it was over 30%.

Also, our Institutional Effectiveness Office works with faculty teaching those courses on student-learning outcomes. That's a part of our course and program-review process. Having supports from IE with the faculty is also another reason why we see these improvements for our student success outcomes in these courses.

**OiYan Poon:** I like that we're talking about supporting pedagogy and instruction and curriculum. When I was a faculty member teaching in courses, you know, fresh out of my Ph.D., I was like, 'I actually don't know how to teach! Someone help me!' [Laughs] So that's *great*. How's the response been from faculty on that?

**Avis Proctor:** We just celebrated our *17th year* of having an outcomes and assessment conference where faculty report on student-learning outcomes, interventions, and how we're showing gains in student learning or refining to improve student learning.

The faculty have been committed to this work for a *long* time. If you remember the whole Spellings Commission, the accountability movement at the K-12 level, moving to higher ed in the outcomes and assessment world. And so, this is now a part of the culture here at the institution that we want to show, how do we know that students are really learning what we say they're learning, right? That's the whole point of outcomes and assessment. And we're committed to that work, and our faculty certainly have embraced it, and they share, internally at that conference that we have annually every fall what gains we are making and where we have opportunities to improve.

**OiYan Poon:** Are there specific data indicators as examples that you have to know whether students are learning what you're saying that they should be learning?

**Avis Proctor:** I'll give you a big-picture in terms of the *multifaceted* approach that we use, shifting some of our courses and programs to eight-week offerings. Having co-requisite courses for our dev-ed math and English courses with low success rates. Our teaching and learning strategies. You've already talked about graduating with a Ph.D. in the *discipline*, but what about *how* to teach, right? So, what are those instructional strategies that are meaningful to improve student *learning*, right? That's the intended outcome. And as you improve learning, you see the increases in success.

One of the things that I heard loud and clear when I arrived here in July 2019 is that we have *a lot of initiatives*. And so, you also get the refrain of initiative fatigue. Our new student success model, we're going to launch in spring '26 and *fully* launch next fall. We also have some lessons learned from smaller initiatives that had some *really* good gains with a group of 50 students here, a group of 200 students here. We really want to *reimagine* our first-year experience for students.

And so, we are doubling down on when students come here in their first year, here are the five milestones we need them to actually embrace. And we'll see some *significant* outcomes in terms of how it accelerates them to graduation. And they're graduating at a *three times* higher rate than those who don't engage in those five milestones. And we call that Path for Success. And so, we're trying to get our students to embrace Path for Success because it shows that they can graduate at a 75% rate versus 25%. So there's the three-to-one label for those students who do *not* embrace in those five milestones.

I think it's important to give you a sense of *all these* approaches that we're doing. So from an eight-week course standpoint, our five-year success rates, fall and spring, looking at those two semesters only, we're at 92% for those who enroll in eight-week courses, with at least one in the first eight weeks and another one in the second eight weeks versus 74.3%.

**OiYan Poon:** Wow.

**Avis Proctor:** For those who don't enroll in any eight-week courses, I want to be clear on what comparison groups we're using there. That tells us there's something important about what's happening with how we've modified, not compromised, learning outcomes now or learning objectives, but how we've modified how we deliver instruction and how students engage in that curriculum in that timeframe.

Not only did we see the success rates significantly higher, we're also seeing that the gaps almost eliminated. It was 2.4% for the comparison group versus 0.1% for those in the eight-week courses. That's practically eliminated. And so knowing that, informing and equipping faculty with that information, and our students, right, so that they can choose the courses that aligns with their life, of course, their programs, and maybe there's good success that they can also achieve in engaging in that format.

**OiYan Poon:** I'm really curious about the five milestones. What are they and what was the process of kind of experimenting and learning and figuring out what to pilot and to scale up.

**Avis Proctor:** The Community College Research Center has some *good* early-momentum metrics data that we reviewed and analyzed and looked and *discovered* that if our students embracing these particular early-momentum metrics, then we'll see these outcomes. So,

one, we want them to actually choose a major, identifying what they actually want to study, choosing a major.

**OiYan Poon:** So that's a milestone.

**Avis Proctor:** Yes, so that's a milestone. Sitting down with their advisor and mapping out an educational plan. Right? Having a plan is *critical*. Once you engage in having that plan, then we have a first-year experience course. We call it the Start Smart course. It's a college success course. If they do *those three things* in their first semester, and then by the *end* of their first year, if they've taken the gateway English and math for their program, *and* they have credit momentum, that's the fifth (milestone).

So, if they have 12 credits as a part-time student or 24 credits as a full-time student, those five together, by the end of their first year, our data says that they can graduate at 75% rate. And we're experiencing our highest graduation rate in the history of our institution right now at 47.6%. And it's trending to go on the other side of 50%. We're excited for that, yet we also know that means one in two *not* graduating.

So, we also have what we call our advancement rate, where we look at those who've graduated, those who are still enrolled working towards their professional and career goals in terms of the credential that they're trying to earn, and those who have transferred. So those *three together*, were actually over 76% for our advancement rate. So we're proud that more than three out of four of our students are advancing in higher education.

**OiYan Poon:** These data, like you said—one out of two—there's still a lot of work to be done, but recognizing through the data that you're *trending* in the right direction, that something's working and you should keep going, I think that's really exciting.

**Avis Proctor:** We, again, recognize students leave us and transfer, or they go into the workforce and sometimes get hired before they finish a credential. So we recognize those are other factors in that graduation rate. And that's why we also look at advancement to get a sense of, okay, are students really moving upward and towards economic mobility? Because at the end of the day, they're coming to us to have a better life for themselves and their families and to contribute to society and make our community stronger.

**OiYan Poon:** That's right. I love that.

I loved learning that you're an expert on research-based instructional strategies and that you're a math educator. And going back to kind of thinking about teaching and pedagogical know-how among faculty across the disciplines: The classroom, I know as a faculty member, I was very, like, 'This is *my* realm, right?' [Laughs] How do you encourage and support instructors to evolve in their pedagogical approaches to be more effective in

meeting learning outcomes? I know we've touched on this a little bit already, but trying to think about, like, how do you bring everyone in, including, you know, maybe when I was a grumpy instructor myself, like, how would you bring people *in* to this movement towards, hey, we can all continuously learn and do better.

**Avis Proctor:** So, I want to first start with, I don't have grumpy faculty. [They both laugh]

**OiYan Poon:** Smart, very diplomatic, excellent presidential response! [More laughing]

**Avis Proctor:** I have engaged faculty that have their views that we consider. One of the things that I *invite* that's important for us to not only think that we have all the answers, right, I want different perspectives at the table.

Our commitment to student success is not just something we *say*. It's in *action* in and out of the classroom, and our faculty play a critical role in that. And so one of the things that our provost has been doing more readily is bringing faculty together college-wide. And let's examine our course data. Let's examine our program data. And what does that mean for you? And what would you do with this information now that you've taken a deeper dive and looking at this information? And so that has motivated faculty to do things differently. And they *own* how they *shape* what they believe would be that intervention.

When I first started, and I'll come back to that in a minute, but when I first started here, it was fall of 2019. And my trustee said, 'What are you going to do about students success?' And I was in the midst of what I call my listening session. I branded my first year as Listen, Leverage, Launch. And so, I wanted to listen, leverage what I've learned, and then be able to launch some strategic interventions that I believe that would improve student outcomes. But what I actually opened up [was] an opportunity for people to bring forth *evidence-based* strategies that *they* believe would impact student success. And I had a team of faculty and staff review those submissions and then said thumbs up to these, ah, go back and get some more questions answered before we fund this initiative and so on.

Thankfully, because of some of that work, we were able to scale, as you know, spring of 2020, the whole world shut down. And because of that work that we started in the fall, we were able to scale some interventions in the middle of the pandemic with technology loans. We put in place some calculator loans, laptop loans, Chromebook loaners to support students to be successful. There are other things that were put in place that addressed food insecurity. We had conducted a Trellis survey that fall. And as a result of learning what financial insecurities our students had, we were able to then, okay, let's work with that foundation and find ways to remove barriers. In fact, I had three pillars of centering equity in our work: removing barriers, closing equity gaps, and executing focused solutions. And so, the focused solutions is in response to *understanding* what our student

needs are. Holistically supporting students is the lens that we use here at Harper, both in and out of the classroom.

Back to the college-wide engagement of faculty, I mentioned learning outcomes. We have a shared governance committee for learning outcomes and assessment, but we also have other initiatives *outside of* shared governance. We were just selected by the Aspen Institute to be in a cohort of 55 community colleges across the country to unlock opportunities for students. We're going to examine our academic programs, and are they *leading* our students to a path with economic mobility? When they finish that program, are they really getting a leg up? We're going to evaluate that and ensure that our students are *at least* earning a living wage or have a laddered-up path that can lead them to that opportunity.

Our last strategic plan, we put a four-year window on our plan. So, we took the last year to build this new plan that we're *just* in the middle of launching right now and getting our targets and measures identified this semester to hold ourselves accountable to. So those are other ways that faculty get involved.

And we have good outcomes, and it's really bringing folks together. Again, an evidence-based strategies, not just, I think this will work. And now we're in a space of, okay, we've done these smaller initiatives that have great outcomes. Let's now get to a level of *scaling* it for impact. And so that's the new lens that we're using with our strategic plan is not just doing to do, even if it's evidence-based, but how do we scale the impact and sustain that work?

Those are some of the ways that we have faculty that are engaged. They *led* some of our strategic planning goal teams. We had a faculty or staff and an administrator co-leading teams to move our work forward. It's critical that faculty are involved, our staff are involved. *Students*. Lifting up the student voice is also important to understand what their needs are so that we can *strategically* respond and support them to be successful.

**OiYan Poon:** There's a couple of things I'm picking up on the faculty engagement piece that *really* seems to shine, which is using evidence. Faculty respect evidence (laughs); that's our bread and butter, right? But then also, I appreciate how there's a deep *respect* for the expertise of the folks who are in the classrooms day in and day out. I think that's *really* vital to this engagement of faculty leadership.

I know you touched on co-requisite earlier. How does the co-requisite approach work at Harper, and how is that connected to this work that you're talking about?

**Avis Proctor:** One of the points of pride, I would say, is that our, again, faculty and our deans have worked in our English and math departments to find ways to accelerate students through development education with learning; not just getting them through, but

actually learning the objectives. Because we *know* from *decades* of research that some students can get *stuck* in developmental education, to the point where some states said, let's just get rid of development education. And so, we're working on two semester pathways in English. They're currently at scale. The overall success rate has increased over the last three years from 48% in fiscal year '22, then it went up to 54% the next year to 64% in fiscal year '24 for students taking the co-requisite with English 101.

And so, we're proud of that work that *they* have shaped and have committed to really thinking about how do we get students through developmental education within two semesters. And how it connects to the student success model is that gateway English course, that fourth milestone I talked about, taking that gateway English and math for your particular program.

If we can find a way to get our students to get that completed by the end of their first year, they're well on their way to graduating in a faster fashion, I would say, compared to those who don't. In fact, I think the older just developmental pathway with English, they were at 53%, and it got to 55% over the next two years. Fifty-three percent was in fiscal school year '21 and then 55% in '22 and another 50%, the same rate in fiscal year '23. So, if you just think about the students in that placement range, they're doing as well *or better* in their co-requisite than they were in just the developmental standalone course. Knowing that, we have these two semester pathways at scale now to help our students choose, hopefully, the co-requisite path and finish their gateway English course by the end of their first year.

**OiYan Poon:** I feel like a *lot* of what you've been sharing with us has to do with delivery of coursework and learning rather than, you know, I think you highlighted this earlier, but I want to bring it up again, which is it's not about changing or reducing rigor. Delivery is not the same as rigor. It's the system of delivery that sounds like might not be working for students. And so then looking at this deeply with data and evidence and research and coming up with piloting new ways of delivery, not changing rigor. It seems like *that's* what's working.

**Avis Proctor:** I really need to emphasize not changing rigor because math is my background. And I remember when I was running an academic math department at my previous institution, I did that for six years, we *strongly* emphasized we were not reducing rigor. We actually put in place what we called math redesign. And it was really flipping the classroom. So there was less sage on the stage, and there was more engagement in deepening the learning. And then students didn't want to leave. [Laughs] Why? Because they were learning!

And so thinking through *how* we deliver instruction. If I were to just teach the way I was taught, it's not going to work for everyone. Context matters, and it's important to engage in reflection on your instructional strategies. And then tweak, because the audience that's before you, there's a mosaic, and it shifts every semester.

**OiYan Poon:** All the time.

**Avis Proctor:** I might teach a section this morning, and the students in that group might be very different than the students in the afternoon section. And so, *tailoring* and understanding what's before you and the learning gaps that are there, I would argue shifting to address the learning gaps. And so first you need to assess what those are, and then your teaching will be informed by knowing that they're struggling in this area more so than in this area, so let's work over here more to deepen the learning, and then they can get the *next* concept, especially if it's a sequential type subject like mathematics.

**OiYan Poon:** It's really being flexible in *meeting* what students need so that they can shine in their own brilliance.

What are some key takeaways you'd share with fellow institutional leaders and senior higher-ed leaders related to how they might think about, on their own campuses, work to reduce DFW?

**Avis Proctor:** I'd be remiss if I didn't talk about what we did for math and then answer that question. Could I?

OiYan Poon: Yeah, yeah, please do.

**Avis Proctor:** Okay, because for math, we have *all* of our students who are placed in developmental education, they have a one- or two-semester path available to them to get through gateway math. And our faculty started with the *non*-algebra-based coursework first, so they did co-requisites with a version of elementary statistics. They have good outcomes there. And *then* they ventured into, after two years of data on those co-requisites, then they were able to now move into, okay, let's do something with intermediate algebra and the STEM path and recognize more scaling is needed.

But we're *happy* to report that the students, you know, *half* of them were being weeded out with intermediate algebra, but we have more students who are getting through with the elementary statistics co-requisite model than before. And there's more that we can share there, but I just wanted to be sure that I shared.

**OiYan Poon:** Yeah, no, and then figuring out what courses work. And I would even say statistics is something that people use *all* the time, every day.

**Avis Proctor:** And students getting into our gateway Math 101 course now, even if they come with no placement scores, they're still being able to successfully complete college-level math course in one semester. There's some more work that we can share there.

**OiYan Poon:** Yeah.

**Avis Proctor:** But to answer your question in terms of what *leaders* should take away from the work that we're doing: First, let's get on the same page as an institution at all levels. So, our trustees, my cabinet, faculty, staff, when we decided as an institution we're going to actually *stop* the smaller initiatives and decide to scale to this new student success model, that was hard, because we had some good things that were working, but at a small scale. And so, getting on the same page, we brought a team of folks together and said, let's look at our first-year student success. Because if they're not getting through that first year successfully, they're not going to stay. And so, I think it's important to share with other leaders that they need to look at their first-year student success outcomes and then decide what interventions are needed, look at the research, the early-momentum metrics, what's working at their institution. They might find their path for success that they need to promote to students and staff to get students on that path so that they can graduate in a timely fashion, or certainly sooner than they're trying to graduate now.

And I would say focus on the meaningful impact and that volume. Finding a way to stop things and finding a way to scale something that's working and finding ways to sustain it. Shifting from all the pilot activity to more effective and impactful methods, I think, is another takeaway.

One of the things that I make it very clear, here's our strategic plan. There's the operational plan that supports the strategic plan, and the work that we're doing at the institution *has* to be in support of that. We have three goals. The first one is having a supportive and inclusive community. Second one is offering innovative and responsive education. And the third one is *how* we function. We want to do it with organizational excellence grounded in our mission and our core values. Being very clear about that work.

The world that we're in right now, there's a framework of VUCA. Things are volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. Our colleges, our students, our communities are looking to us. There's the other side of VUCA: to provide vision, understanding, clarity, and agility.

**OiYan Poon:** Wow.

**Avis Proctor:** *That* is where we are. We have to be agile in the work that we do, responsive to the complex environment. We can do this. If we ground ourselves in our mission and

*come together*—there's *power* in community. And we know there's a transformational power that education brings to each and every one of our students.

**OiYan Poon:** VUCA. I feel like this is just going to be the title of this episode (laughs). I love that, VUCA. The two sides of VUCA is such a balance, and I feel like that's what's kind of in tension and conflict in a lot of ways.

Speaking about *conflict* and *tension*, you have not shied away from the term 'equity,' but I know that that's something that has been really under attack is equity work. Like, how do you respond to concerns out there about, like, oh, well, equity. But so much of what you've talked about, just improving how Harper College delivers services and coursework and learning opportunities to students, learning engagement to *all* students. Can you talk a little bit about how you're thinking about the current political climate and the work that you're doing to implement this new student success model, reducing DFW rates, and doing it in a very strategic, evidence, data-informed way?

**Avis Proctor:** As a community college, everyone shows up at our doors. I go back to grounding ourselves in our mission. Our mission at Harper is to offer affordable, accessible, quality education, and in collaboration with our partners, transform lives, the workforce, and society. It's very clear what we're called to do, what we *want* to fulfill as an open-door-access institution with everyone here. We're here to serve all of our students, and we're here to serve them well.

First, we have to know *who* they are in order to be able to serve them and in order to be able to serve them well. This new student success model, we're going to brand it. So we'll have a name for it shortly. I told my team: I want this to be inescapable. So, they came up with this phrase, "inescapable opportunities and inevitable success." I love that. Again, thinking about our first-year experience for students. In their first year, if we get *all* of our students, this is not tied to race or ethnicity or gender. It's tied to our first-year students. When they come to us, whatever their background may be, right out of high school or adult learners. We want them to engage in this path for success.

The data not only shows that we have them graduate at such a high rate, *the gaps disappear* practically. Again, it's powerful data that we have that we *really* need our students to embrace that path for success because once they do it, the data is showing that they can meet their goals that they've set for themselves. And regardless of their background, they're graduating about the same rate. So we really are excited about this work. We're scaling it, and we don't know if it'll work exactly the way it worked in the smaller initiatives. If we get better success with a higher number of students, I consider that a win

already because we're scaling this in successful work that we've seen at smaller levels within the institution.

**OiYan Poon:** So, it's a process of continual learning and checking in because once you launch this initiative, it's still going to be evolving and you should be checking in with the data –

**Avis Proctor:** That's correct.

**OiYan Poon:** and evidence to see, okay, how can we *keep* improving?

**Avis Proctor:** And we look at how populations are faring as well.

To your point about focusing on equity, we still want to know that *all* of our students are faring. We have wraparound supports in place to support our students there as well, holistic advising. Again, taking the elements of these smaller initiatives that worked *very well*, great outcomes, and putting them into this one model at scale. We're hoping that we'll see greater outcomes for our students.

**OiYan Poon:** Yeah. I love how everything is so student-centered, that you're recognizing through this approach that every student, like you said, you're a community college, the mission is they're going to come to you *as they are* and *who they are*, and they are all so different and unique. And so there is just no one size fits all!

**Avis Proctor:** There isn't. It's a multifaceted approach. And our institutional effectiveness measures that we hold ourselves accountable to is publicly available on our website. By the end of this fiscal year, we've had it for four years now, that here are the things tied to, back to your point of the student focus, it's tied to the student experience.

So, it's called You Matter, We Care, SOAR Framework. The SOAR acronym is search, onboard, advanced, realize. That is *how* they engage, figuring out what they want to do and onboarding them, advances, actually, them taking the coursework and their programs and then realizing [it] is not only completion, but it's also *post-Harper* success. We *own* where they go or how they enter that workforce with that living wage we talked about in terms of the equitability. That's publicly available. We look at trends and we break it down by different groups to see how students are faring. Again, it's a process of continuous improvement.

**OiYan Poon:** Yeah.

**Avis Proctor:** There's definitely room for improvement, but we're excited about where it's headed.

**OiYan Poon:** This work has really relied on Harper's leadership really understanding and mapping out student-progress journeys, the student journey, and what is ideal or different pathways towards success in order to support students.

Did you all do, like, student-journey mapping as part of this process? Like, understanding how to figure out, like, those five milestones, like how should students progress? I know you said you used some research from CCRC, but again, like one size doesn't fit all. So how did you figure out, oh yeah, this seems to work with how students progress?

**Avis Proctor:** We have *great* minds there and they looked at the early-momentum metrics that were identified in the research and saw that this was the path that was working here at Harper on those momentum metrics. When they shared the results, we were *thrilled* and said, okay, we've got to promote this, and we've got to actually embrace this.

In fact, I went to talk to a faculty senate a few weeks ago promoting the Path for Success. So, I talked to my operations counselor as we were walking through our operational plan yesterday, talking about Path for Success. I wanted to be a part of the fabric here at the institution. My student government president a couple months ago, we were talking, and I asked him too: 'Are you on the Path for Success?' So, making it very prominent in *my* conversation with people across the campus, in the community.

**OiYan Poon:** Part of the culture. Making it really, weaving it.

**Avis Proctor:** Yeah, it's a cultural shift, for sure.

**OiYan Poon:** Yeah, weaving it into the culture. And I love how it's this use of data-informed leadership to really *drive* everything towards success.

Do you have any last thoughts about data use and informing leadership for student success, particularly around reducing DFW rates?

**Avis Proctor:** One of the things that I'll say is we democratize data. Institutions, there were times years ago that IR office, the Institutional Research Office, would like hold on to data and they'll put out those standard reports. And they were in a place where it would take forever to get an answer to a question. And so if you *democratize* data and make them available both internally and externally, like I mentioned, our SOAR dashboard is publicly available on our IEMs. We have 16 of those. But making sure that, internally, people have data that they can slice and dice.

There's a professional support or development that you'll need there. Our IR office put out a data-literacy badge for people to *earn* and make sure that they're actually interpreting the data accurately. You can have something before you and not really know how to interpret what's there. And so, doubling down on *equipping* individuals in your institution to have

data literacy and make sure the data is available for them to slice and dice in the context of what's needed to do their work. I would give that advice to my colleagues. It really has opened up a lot of opportunities for people to engage and think about and see and challenge assumptions in some ways, and give clarity as to what students are *really* experiencing in our courses and on campus.

**OiYan Poon:** It sounds like it's an invitation to all the stakeholders and community members to be really active and engaged in contributing towards the success of everyone at Harper.

**Avis Proctor:** Absolutely.

**OiYan Poon:** A *huge* thank you to President Proctor for sharing your insights and leadership wisdom on this episode.

Dr. Proctor, if listeners would like to learn more, what are some resources you would recommend or where would you send them to on your own website?

**Avis Proctor:** So, on our website, you can go to our [SOAR dashboards](#). So if you google “Harper College IEMs” or “Harper College SOAR dashboard,” you should be able to find it there. We'll have 16 institutional-effective measures tied to the student experience.

Our [Path for Success webpage](#) where the five milestones are there that worked for our institution as we looked at early-momentum metrics for students. They're graduating at three times higher rate than those who don't engage in those milestones.

We did some work with Achieving the Dream around community vibrancy. So, if they wanted to google “Harper College Community Vibrancy, Achieving the Dream.” It's a [small document](#) they could read there as well.

And I would, again, encourage folks to go to Community College Research Center and see what they produce in terms of research on early-momentum metrics. Looking at that first-year experience of students is critical for them to be retained. We want them fall to spring persistence as well as fall to fall, and also help them get into that finish line and transfer and beyond.

**OiYan Poon:** Amazing. Thank you so much. We'll see you next time.

**Avis Proctor:** Thank you.

**Sal Nudo:** In 2022, Governor J.B. Pritzker signed a law that required public community colleges and universities in Illinois to submit equity plans to the state, starting in 2024. As a result, these Illinois SUCCESS podcast episodes are intended to encourage and support

higher education leaders to keep the momentum going. This includes planning, implementation, and learning, with the goal of closing equity gaps on campuses.

The Acronym SUCCESS stands for Supporting Universities and Colleges in Creating Equitable Student Success. This series is part of a collaboration among OCCRL, the Illinois Board of Higher Education, and the Illinois Community College Board. In each episode, we converse with leaders from Illinois colleges and universities to hear their wisdom and experiences on effectively using data to advance institutional equity improvement strategies.

Background music for this podcast is provided by Pixabay. Thank you for listening and for your contributions to equity, justice, and excellence in education for all students.