



## **Richland in 2014: Executive Summary of REACH**

### **Overview**

In August 2003, the Richland Board of Trustees charged the Richland Educational Advisory Committee for Higher Education (REACH) to determine the following:

- Key issues facing Richland Community College.
- Where the College should be in the future to assure student success.
- What facilities and financial and human resources will be needed.
- How to accomplish necessary changes for that future.
- How to establish a long-term, meaningful and ongoing communication process with the community.

To accomplish this charge, a Facilitating Team of fifteen people, including six Community Chairs, was created to plan the process to involve District citizens in this dialogue. (A complete roster appears in Section 2.) After 7 REACH meetings and 10 Facilitating Team meetings, the Facilitating Team and REACH participants present the accompanying recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

### **Process**

Using the mission, vision, Strategic Plan, and other documents, the Facilitating Team determined general topics, including job preparation/economic development, awareness of Richland, seamless education & lifelong learning, finances, and diversity. The Team decided that the underlying focus should be *Richland in 2014*, a ten-year vision that fit with the Strategic Planning concept of the College. The Team planned the calendar, the general format for presentations and work activities, and the communication methods for the meetings. Each meeting would include information presented by “experts” not just from the College but also from agencies or organizations with whom the College partners. (See list of presenters in Section 2.) Also, the Facilitating Team, and particularly the Community Chairs, would be visible at each of the REACH meetings. A work activity was developed for each REACH meeting to gather ideas and responses to the topic presented. (See Section 3, calendar and agenda sample.)

Publicity for the REACH meetings occurred through a number of venues: newspaper advertisements, monthly WAND television spots, and letters of invitation. Each month, about 2200 letters were sent to individuals whose names had been gathered through a number of sources, and for certain topics, special invitations were sent to principals and counselors, high school students, and legislators. Over the course of the sessions, approximately 100 people participated (unduplicated headcount), and several community members attended multiple sessions. For the June and July planning sessions, letters were sent only to those individuals

who had participated in at least one of the previous sessions. The Richland website included a link that was updated after each meeting. The final approved recommendations will be posted, and final copies will be mailed to the participants. (Sample letter, press release, and ad in Section 3; materials for each meeting are also included in labeled Sections.)

### **Recommendations**

At a special July work session, the final recommendations based on all of the work at the REACH sessions were reviewed by the Facilitating Team and by REACH participants. The recommendations are directly linked to the Strategic Plan, mission, and vision of Richland Community College. These visions for Richland in 2014 fall into six distinct areas:

- ❖ Expand transfer and occupational programs to meet demands for contemporary and future career and job needs.
- ❖ Strengthen positive relations and connections with K-12 systems in the District.
- ❖ Develop program and continuing education initiatives to serve the District's diverse populations.
- ❖ Enhance job training and retraining initiatives to continue the College's flexible model of service.
- ❖ Develop initiatives to serve the District's undereducated citizens, those who lack a high school diploma or GED.
- ❖ Increase activities that build a positive sense of community for current students, alumni and friends, and the District.

Several common themes can be found:

***Marketing and Program Information:*** Although not included specifically in each REACH session, informing the public of what Richland does was interwoven in everything discussed. Marketing includes more than just public information about the College's affordable education product. Specifically, the REACH committee stressed that the message of Richland needs to be spread more vigorously. Richland is seen as a positive presence for sustainable change and growth in the District's communities—that message needs to be delivered.

***Technology:*** Another common thread was Richland's need to utilize current technology and anticipate technology changes as that technology relates to new jobs and changing careers in our District. This goal requires significant financial commitment for both training and equipment. Further, it is possible that the viability of all the College's programs and services will be measured by its connection to technology and innovation.

***Quality Faculty and Staff:*** Continued excellence in faculty and staff is a central pillar of Richland's strength. In order to maintain that level of excellence and professional commitment, the College must continue to build on its strong foundation of hiring a diverse, qualified faculty and staff. Therefore, we must be aggressive in recruiting and retaining professionals for all levels of employment at Richland who will enhance the College and its services.

***Finances:*** No College or business can function without strict adherence to fiscal responsibility. The College staff was commended for its continued ability to offer so much on such a lean budget, particularly in such tight financial times and unpredictable budget considerations at the state and federal level. Because the College has so many sources of income that may be in jeopardy, additional funding sources will be required to sustain programs and development. Some of these sources include expanding grants, reaching out to new student bases, and tapping other options to increase funding without raising taxes.

### **Conclusions**

Because of the REACH public engagement initiative, the College was able to learn through positive confirmation what it is doing well and the constructive recommendations that will move the College forward to its goal of 2014. The diligence and hard work of the Community Chairs and the Facilitating Team who made this positive public engagement possible should be commended. Commitment, hard work, and finding new ways to be fiscally responsible in meeting the recommendations of REACH will be the College's distinct challenges for years to come.