Thriving in an evolving world is core to mission at Pierce College. We started our student success journey in 2010 looking at longitudinal data, and we were shocked that our three-year graduation rate was a mere 18.7 percent. How could that be? We were all supportive of students. We knew the Raymonds and the Ericas who had defied the odds and had gotten to the finish line. And that was the problem; they had to defy the odds. So we needed to change the odds.

In 2012 we joined Achieving the Dream to frame our work. We made our first strategic decision. It was not going to be an initiative of working around the edges. It had to be full-on mission fulfillment to create quality educational opportunities for a diverse community of learners to thrive in an evolving world. We set up a goal to increase graduation rates to 45 percent and to close our equity gaps by 2020. And like our students, we knew what we wanted, but we weren’t sure how to get there.

We made changes in math, in English, and mandatory college success and orientation and advising. We had over 40 interventions, large-scale engagement in leadership across the district from faculty, staff, administrators, and students.

Our second key decision was to be data informed. When we talk about data, we say the what, the so what, and the now what. We democratized our data, meaning that everyone could see everyone’s completion rates by faculty, by course, by student demographic, by mode of instruction. Now, this wasn’t a finger-pointing activity. This was about creating communities of practice and research that was action oriented, changing pedagogy and processes with equity in mind.

The third key decision was to take our open, transparent, inclusive budget process where annually we made cuts in our budgets and we moved them to the innovative and transformative student success priorities. We were pleased to become one of the cohort colleges on guided pathways. It actually took us to a new level, and we had a lot of hard homework to do after our institutes, much like our students have.

We organized. First we talked to students like what do you want to call these, and they said career pathways, and they helped us identify six. We organized around the four pillars. And an important activity that we engaged in is that our faculty created a learning inventory where they identified all the knowledge, skills, and abilities that were necessary in each of the six pathways. In addition, they took all of their hundred maps and put them into the pathway. They didn’t horse trade courses to go on the website. We made a commitment to have all students on a pathway by 2018, and that happened. We’re using our college success class to help them decide.

You know, we were an Aspen Prize winner this year as a rising star. The prize was nice, but what’s more important is what it says that we’re accomplishing: that we’re getting students to the finish line and beyond. I’m pleased to say that we have increased graduation rates by over 104 percent. We are on target for our 2020 year goal. Now, we haven’t closed all of our achievement gaps, but all student groups have increased the rate of graduation.

I earlier mentioned to you Raymond. Raymond is our student body president at our Fort Steilacoom campus, and I asked him because he is a scholar. He came from a drug-addicted family. He had drugs and gangs and went to prison, and he found Pierce College, and we’re glad. And tomorrow at graduation he’s going to speak to our students. And I asked him if he had something to share with you, and he said, “Pierce College guides students to their passion. They build better leaders for a better future.” He said, “You care about us, and you educate us to exist in a diverse world on all aspects of our lives.”

And so with that I want to say to you that at Pierce College thriving in an evolving world is key to us. We want all students to have their possibilities realized. Thank you.

**[END OF FILE]**