

**Steven Rose, president, Passaic County Community College**

M: Today we welcome Steven Rose president of Passaic County Community College, which serves over 13,000 students on four campuses in New Jersey. Passaic is one of more than 700 community colleges that have received federal grants known as TAACCCT –The US Department of Labor’s Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grant Program.

TAACCCT helps community colleges and other eligible institutions of higher education expand and improve their ability to deliver education and career training programs that can be completed in two years or less, and prepare dislocated workers and other adults for employment in high-wage, high-skill occupations.

As part of the TAACCCT grant, Passaic County community college leads the Northeast Resiliency Consortium, a seven-college, multi-state consortium that works to help students and colleges develop the resiliency they need to thrive in the face of rapid economic and environmental change. The NRC helps trade-impacted students help build their capacity to adapt well in the changing labor market and provide access to college to gain the skills, competencies, and credentials that lead to family-sustaining wage careers.

M: You’re doing a lot of innovative work around student success at Passaic County community college. Why do you think Passaic has been so successful at creating innovation and openness to change?

STEVEN ROSE: Well, because we’re being realistic about what we can accomplish. It’s understanding the fact that we’re working within a system that is going to be slow to change, we’re working within a system where hey it’s going to be tough. So another good example, when we got involved with Achieving the Dream and when we got involved with looking in development education reform one of the things we took a look at is we took, we really looked at the data, we looked at our lowest level of English as a second language.

So, we were finding that students who were being put into this lowest level unfortunately rarely were making it out of that level.

So after, and shame on us, it took us a long time until we really figured out this wasn't working, so what did we do? We said, "You know what, we're going to move this out of this way of teaching it and we're going to take these 200 students each year who were taking this lowest level and we're going to move them over to our continuing education side and we're going to create a different type of program for them, a much more intensive program. Guess what happened? to the federal government it looked like enrollment dropped here at the college. Even our auditors made a note of it when they did our audit, "It looks like your enrollment is dropping at the college." The fact is our enrollment never dropped.

We're still teaching them, [this was an incredibly positive initiative that we took and it is working. This is a really positive thing, but we really had to fight some battles here in order to get this done, because it's really working against the system.

M: What else has helped you innovate and create change at the college?

STEVEN ROSE: One of the things that makes things a little easier here is we have got some very cooperative people and that, and that helps. We have got, we have got people who are willing to not put up barriers to getting things done, and that's not true at every institution. So, we have our faculty are bargained collectively, they're unionized and they have a contract, and their contract very specifically lays out their terms and conditions of employment and very specifically says what they can and cannot do. And truthfully, if they, if they stuck to it religiously we wouldn't get a lot of stuff done around here. To be honest, it's the kind of thing that if there wasn't some flexibility there it would be very, very difficult.

They could have seen what we did in English as a second language being a real threat to them, because truthfully it was eliminating, potentially eliminating jobs. And at another institution they would have fought that move even though it was the right thing for the institution to do.

STEVEN ROSE: Instead of fighting it here, they thought it was a great idea and they thought it was the right thing to do. So, again, it is trying to build a culture and an atmosphere where we're doing the right thing for the students we're trying to serve here. It's really keeping focused on the mission, but again working within those things and building a level of trust. It's really understanding that hey, we're all here for the right thing. Next week we'll have a convocation at the college. It's the one day a year where we kind of get together and talk and we'll take, we'll take the entire day to really talk about our goals and talk about why we're here, what we're trying to do, we're going to talk about why we're here and really set the tone. And it's a really important day for the college. This is a day you've got to be on campus, because it's a bonding day, it's a day to bond not only with each other but bond with the institution. It's the day where we kind of all get on the same page And that's important, because this stuff isn't easy. Change isn't easy, and when you make a decision like we did in ESL and in hundreds of other small decisions and big decisions that we have to make there has to be that trust in the institutions to make, to make these things happen.

M: One of the areas of change for Passaic, and other community colleges, is around aligning the curriculum with employer needs in order to help students get good-paying, high-demand jobs. How have you navigated that change?

STEVEN ROSE: You still have folks here who went through a more traditional liberal arts type environment who don't understand necessarily the tie to employment or the tie to employers or what students are looking for, why students are coming here and what they're looking to get out of it. And just in my almost 30

years here I've seen, there is faculty who have been here longer than I have, and I have seen their transition through the years, and I saw some who were diehard traditional liberal arts type folks who would have absolutely scoffed at the idea that we would be in any way trying to do anything to cater to employers' whims or anything like that, that we're here to deliver a liberal arts education to our students and ensure that these students have a basis for lifelong learning and all this and that, and they get it now. While they still think some of these things are important, they understand that there is more to it than that. And that's a big deal.

M: It sounds like what your describing is at the heart of the work of the Northeast Resiliency Consortium, where you're working to bring together longstanding and newer approaches to community college education.

STEVEN ROSE: Absolutely. I mean, look, the whole concept of the resiliency competencies and stuff for the modern students are important. These are, this is our modern student today. Look, prior learning assessment I am very excited about that for our institution, you look at our catalogue 30 years ago we had a page on prior learning assessment, we didn't call it that, but we've always had policies on it. it's not something we're good at. I am hoping now we become good at it and I'm hoping now it is something that we're really able to serve students a lot better

M: What have you learned about formalizing credit for prior learning and doing prior learning assessment in a more systematic way?

STEVEN ROSE: Well, I think it's, I think we've become better at it. I think one of the things that we have done over the past couple of years is that every course now has learning outcomes. That's not something we had 20 years ago, that we have learning outcomes specifically put on every syllabus. We used to have just what you did in every course. Now we have, here is what we expect you to master from this course. Here are the learning outcomes for the course." Now, so that makes it a little easier when you have learning outcomes to

really say, to come up with what would be the equivalency of what we expect you to get if you're going to, if we're going to be able to assess what your prior learning is.

M: What have you learned about making the most of grant opportunities like TAACCCT?

STEVEN ROSE: One of the interesting things we learned during this, and we have been very fortunate,—this institution, we have, we have been blessed with being able—to have several grants, not only the TAACCCT grant but we have had several Title Five grants and really STEM grants that have really, really been able to do a lot to build the institution's capacity. That's great, but one of the things we also learned, and when this, when the TAACCCT grant came on top of this, when the TAACCCT grant came it was probably at that moment we had more large grants than we have ever had in our history. And truthfully, the realization came to us that okay we're at a point in time we have got to make sure that we are really, and I'm using, I'm going to use this term in the most positive way, exploiting these opportunities for all that they are worth. We started having meetings on exploiting our grant opportunities, basically formed the committee on grants around here, and to try and figure out what is the best way of taking advantage. And truthfully, how can we create a synergy between these grants, because some of them have similar purposes they were working on; there is going to be some overlap. I mean obviously the success of our students was a common theme of all of the grants that we had, so you're going to have some overlap here between these things. And we started convenings where we were having all of the grants reporting out to each other, talking about what everybody is working on.

M: You first began putting the various grants in dialogue with each other began two years ago, at the convocation. Is there anything you would have done differently to make the most of all the different grants you received around the same time?

STEVEN ROSE: What would I do differently? I would have started that even earlier. That is really hard, really taking advantage of all of these opportunities and making the most of them. They all, they have a finite period that you're working in. You know, you apply for these grants, typically it's the third week of September that I'll get a call from our Congressman who tells us, "Congratulations, you're getting the grant." and of course the grant starts October 1<sup>st</sup>.

So the clock starts October 1<sup>st</sup> on spending this sum of money, So, all of a sudden you have to start mobilizing. You have no staff. You have no infrastructure. You have nothing. So, mobilizing on these grants, if you're lucky it's four to five, six months until you're at least somewhat operational on these things. But you get used, you make the most of what you've got

M: Now that the first two rounds of TAACCCT grants are finished, and the third and fourth are ending soon, what is important to consider about sustaining the work of the TAACCCT grants?

STEVEN ROSE: Changing culture is the hardest thing to do at the institution and the most important thing to do at the institution. When we look at things like, like a PLA, if we truly have meaningful reform of our PLA practices over time and if we really build capacity and do that that is something that will affect this institution forever.

M: What advice would you give to colleagues at other colleges about building a culture of innovation and really embracing institutional change?

STEVEN ROSE: Well, it's kind of, it's understanding the, understanding the culture of your institution. You really can't do anything if you don't understand the culture of your institution.

It's understanding that change doesn't happen quickly and change doesn't happen easily, and you can't force it. It's got to kind of be a natural process. You have to understand it. You have to understand that there are forces out there that are going to make it difficult, there are just forces that we can't change,

and there is things that will frustrate you. I wasn't happy when people said, "Oh your enrollment is going down." No, it's not going down. We made some positive change by moving some students from one program to another. But so you've got to get over that. I had to explain it to my Board of Trustees and they said, "That makes sense." But you have to, you have to explain these things.

And yeah, part of it is being here for 20 years, like I am, helps a little. You're a little more confident when you're pretty secure in what you're doing and it's tougher for a new President or tougher for a new administration. I'm very fortunate that I've got a seasoned administration here who are also very confident in what they are doing and are trusted by the folks who work for them and that helps at an institution. But you've got to really understand your institution, and forcing change never works. As important as it is, forcing change never works. You've got to bring the institution along and that just comes by showing people what is going on.

And data, research are incredibly important and it's powerful. It's incredibly powerful. And building your research capacity at your institution is very important. And once you have built your research capacity showing people, showing people how to do it, showing people how to understand data and research is something that is important.

STEVEN ROSE: We--spent a lot of time on that here, we spent a lot of time going through this first level of ESL and showing what the results were, and everybody really understood. There was no denying what we were doing wasn't working. [And there was again no finger pointing. Yeah, we could have, we could have just said, "Hey, faculty, what have you been doing all these years?" No, it wasn't. It was just-- "Administration, why did you let this happen for all these years?" No, it wasn't. There was no finger pointing. It was just, "Hey, we've got, we've got this situation. Now what are we going to do about it?"

STEVEN ROSE: And if you approach it from that standpoint you can move forward.

M: Thank you to Steve Rose, President of Passaic County Community College in New Jersey. Listen to the other conversations about the impact of TAACCCT with community college presidents in this podcast series. The U.S. Department of Labor implements the TAACCCT program in partnership with the Department of Education. One point nine billion dollars (\$1.9 Billion) in grants were awarded under the TAACCCT program. For more information visit [TAACCCT.org](http://TAACCCT.org).

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