



## The Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE*)

# Overview of 2016 Survey Results Tarrant County College District

## Introduction

The Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE*) is a product and service of the Center for Community College Student Engagement. Administered during the 4th and 5th weeks of the fall academic term, *SENSE* asks students to reflect on their earliest experiences with the college and aims to help community colleges investigate reasons why some entering students may persist and succeed while others may not. Students' responses are used to develop scores on key benchmarks found to be related to student persistence and success. Results from this exploratory research may provide insight into students' perspectives and may be used to facilitate discussions within academic programs, student services, or campus-wide.

After a short description of the *SENSE* cohort and *SENSE* sampling methods, the 2016 student profile is presented. Scores on the benchmarks are then provided, followed by an examination of the individual items TCCD performs highest and lowest on compared to the *SENSE* cohort.

## *SENSE* Member Colleges

*SENSE* data analyses are based on a three-year cohort of entering student data from participating colleges. If a college participated more than one time in the three-year period, the cohort includes data only from that college's most recent year of participation. The *SENSE* 2016 (2014-2016) cohort includes 266 institutions in 39 states and the District of Columbia. One hundred and three 2016 cohort colleges are classified as small (<4,500), 67 as medium (4,500-7,999), 63 as large (8,000-14,999), and 33 as extra-large institutions (15,000 + credit students). Sixty-six of the colleges are classified as urban-serving, 52 as suburban-serving, and 137 as rural-serving.

## *SENSE* Sampling

In *SENSE* sampling procedures, students are sampled at the classroom level. The survey was administered in classes randomly selected from those courses most likely to enroll entering students, with a random sample pulled from all first college-level English and math courses, all developmental reading, writing, and math courses, and student success courses. Of those entering students sampled at our institution, 1,248 respondents submitted usable surveys. The number of completed surveys produced an overall "percent of target" rate of 83%.

## 2016 Student Respondent Profile TCCD

### Enrollment Status

37% of our entering student respondents report being part-time college students, compared to 27% of the 2016 *SENSE* Cohort colleges' entering student respondents. 63% of the entering student respondents at our college report attending college full-time, while 73% of the 2016 *SENSE* Cohort colleges' entering student respondents attended full-time. Population data for all students at our college are 69% part-time and 31% full-time. This inverse representation is a result of the sampling technique and the in-class administration process. For this reason, survey results are either weighted or disaggregated on the full-time/part-time variable so that reports will accurately reflect the underlying student population.

### Age

Entering student respondents at our college range in age from 18 to 65+ years old. 87% are between 18 and 24 years old. Students at our college are about the same age as the 2016 *SENSE* Cohort respondents, of which 88% are between 18 and 24.

### Sex

44% of our entering student respondents are male and 56% are female which is comparable to the 2016 *SENSE* Cohort, which is 44% male and 53% female.

### Racial/Ethnic Identification

33% of our entering student respondents identified themselves as White, Non-Hispanic; 40% as Hispanic, Latino, Spanish; 14% as Black or African American; and 8% as Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander. 1% of the student respondents are American Indian or Native American. 4% marked *other* when responding to the question, "What is your racial/ethnic identification?" Our student sample is more diverse than the 2016 *SENSE* Cohort, which is composed of 47% White/Non-Hispanic; 23% Hispanic, Latino, Spanish; 13% Black or African American; 4% Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander; and 2% American Indian or Native American respondents.

### Goals

Entering student respondents were asked to indicate their reasons or goals for attending this college; students could choose more than one goal. For the *SENSE* cohort as a whole, 60% had completing a certificate as a goal, 82% had obtaining an associates as a goal, and 79% planned on transferring to a 4-year university. As a District, 53% of TCCD students indicated that completing a certificate is a goal, 80% indicated that obtaining an Associate degree is a goal, and 89% indicated that transfer to a 4-year college is a goal.

## **SENSE Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice**

To assist colleges in their efforts to reach for excellence, the Center reports national benchmarks of effective practice with entering students in community colleges. Research shows that the more actively engaged students are—with college faculty and staff, with other students, and with the subject matter—the more likely they are to learn and to achieve their academic goals.

*SENSE* benchmarks are groups of conceptually related survey items that focus on institutional practices and student behaviors that promote student engagement early in the college experience—and that are positively related to student learning and persistence. Benchmarks are used to compare each institution's performance to that of similar institutions and with the *SENSE* Cohort. Each individual benchmark score is computed by averaging the scores on survey items that make up that benchmark. Benchmark scores are then standardized so that the mean (the average of all participating students) is always 50 and the standard deviation is 25. The six benchmarks:

### **Early Connections**

When students describe their early college experiences, they typically reflect on occasions when they felt discouraged or thought about dropping out. Their reasons for persisting almost always include one common element: a strong, early connection to someone at the college.

### **High Expectations and Aspirations**

Nearly all students arrive at their community colleges intending to succeed and believing that they have the motivation to do so. When entering students perceive clear, high expectations from college staff and faculty, they are more likely to understand what it takes to be successful and adopt behaviors that lead to achievement. Students then often rise to meet expectations, making it more likely that they will attain their goals. Often, students' aspirations also climb, and they seek more advanced credentials than they originally envisioned.

### **Clear Academic Plan and Pathway**

When a student, with knowledgeable assistance, creates a road map — one that shows where he or she is headed, what academic path to follow, and how long it will take to reach the end goal— that student has a critical tool for staying on track. Students are more likely to persist if they not only are advised about what courses to take, but also are helped to set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them.

### **Effective Track to College Readiness**

Nationally, more than six in 10 entering community college students are underprepared for college-level work. Thus, significant improvements in student success will hinge upon effective assessment, placement of students into appropriate courses, and implementation of effective strategies to ensure that students build academic skills and receive needed support.

### **Engaged Learning**

Instructional approaches that foster engaged learning are critical for student success. Because most community college students attend college part-time, and most also must find ways to balance their studies with work and family responsibilities, the most effective learning experiences will be those the college intentionally designs.

### **Academic and Social Support Network**

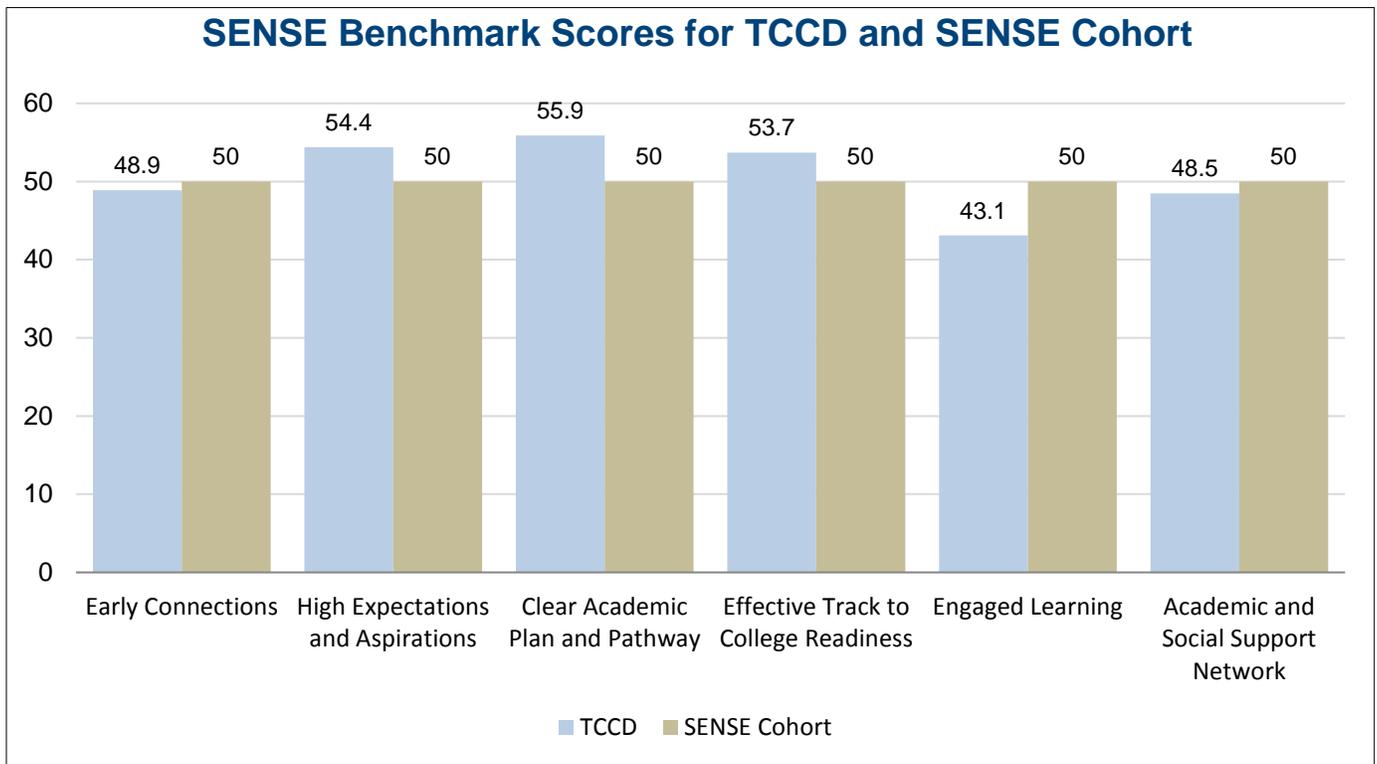
Students benefit from having a personal network that enables them to obtain information about college services, along with the academic and social support critical to student success. Because entering students often don't know what they don't know, colleges must purposefully create those networks.

## TCCD Benchmark Scores

Figure 1 below provides TCCD’s performance on the Benchmarks (described in previous section) and is given in relation to the SENSE cohort as a whole. TCCD compares favorably to the SENSE cohort in regard to High Expectations and Aspirations, Clear Academic Plan and Pathway, and Effective Track to College Readiness, while comparing less favorably on Early Connections, Engaged Learning, and Academic and Social Support Network.

In order to delve more deeply into students’ responses, the next two sections examine some of the constituent items that make up the benchmark scores. Specifically, the five items which TCCD compares most and least favorably to the SENSE cohort are examined.

Figure 1.

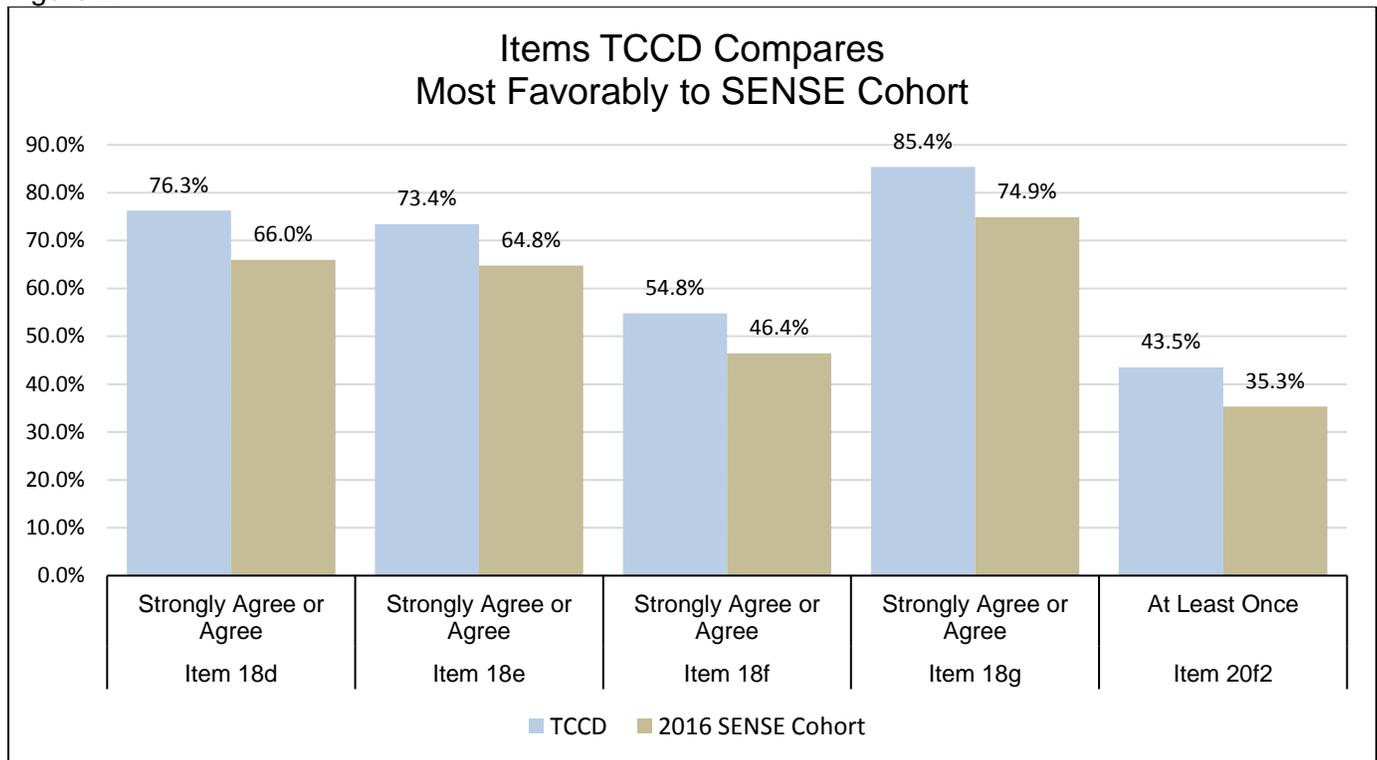


## Aspects of Highest Student Engagement TCCD

Benchmark scores provide a useful means of reviewing and understanding key points from the SENSE data. A way to dig more deeply into the benchmark scores is to examine the specific items that contribute to the overall benchmark score. The next two sections highlight the five items where TCCD scores most and least favorably compared to the total 2016 SENSE cohort.

Figure 2 displays the percentage of students who endorsed items on which TCCD performed most favorably in relation to the rest of the 2016 SENSE cohort. As a whole, the items indicate that TCCD students interact with and receive service from academic advisors more so than the SENSE cohort. Students report not only meeting with advisors, but also report goal setting with advisors including a plan to achieve them. In addition, students select a plan of study and courses needed to take during their first term. TCCD students also reported using writing and math more often than the SENSE cohort, suggesting student engagement through useful skills.

Figure 2.

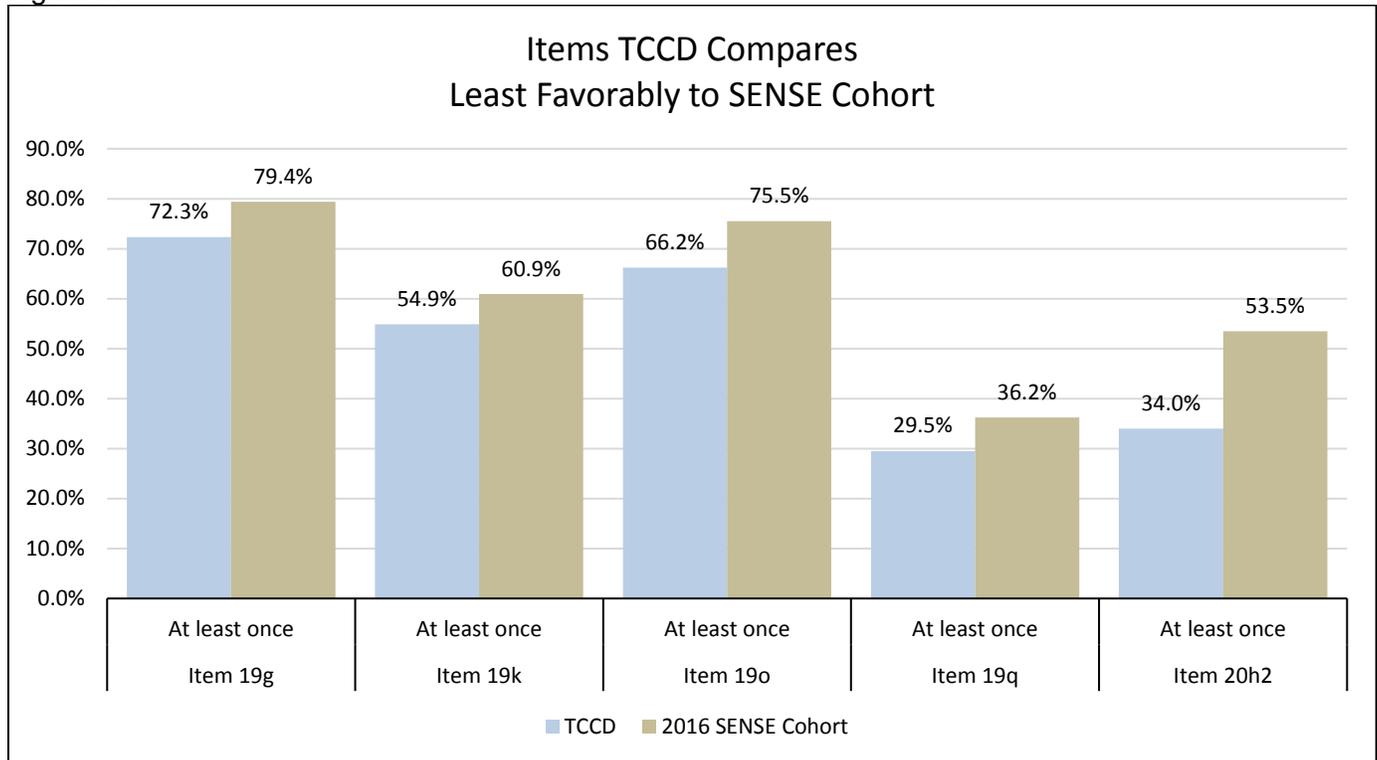


Benchmark	Item Number	Item
Clear Academic Plan & Pathway	18d	Able to meet with an academic advisor at times convenient for me
Clear Academic Plan & Pathway	18e	An advisor helped me to select a course of study, program, or major
Clear Academic Plan & Pathway	18f	An advisor helped me to set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them
Clear Academic Plan & Pathway	18g	An advisor helped me to identify the courses I needed to take during my first semester/quarter
Engaged Learning	20f2	Frequency: Used writing, math, or other skill lab

## Aspects of Lowest Student Engagement TCCD

Figure 3 shows the items which TCCD performed least favorably compared to the SENSE cohort. Taken together, the items suggest that TCCD students tend to interact less with peers as a part of coursework, and do not receive what they feel is prompt feedback on performance. For example, they are less likely to work with and discuss course materials with peers during class than the SENSE cohort and are less likely to use a computer lab or communicate via electronic means about coursework.

Figure 3.



Benchmark	Item Number	Item
Engaged Learning	19g	Worked with other students on a project or assignment during class
Engaged Learning	19k	Used an electronic tool to communicate with another student about coursework
Engaged Learning	19o	Received prompt written or oral feedback from instructors on your performance
Engaged Learning	19q	Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with instructors outside of class
Engaged Learning	20h2	Used computer lab