

THE 2023 ASPEN PRIZE

FOR COMMUNITY
COLLEGE EXCELLENCE

**COLLEGE
EXCELLENCE
PROGRAM**
♣ aspen institute

COLLEGE EXCELLENCE PROGRAM

aspen institute

The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program aims to advance higher education practices and leadership that significantly improve student learning, completion, and employment after college—especially for the growing population of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds on American campuses.

The \$1 million Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, awarded every two years, is the nation’s signature recognition for America’s community colleges—as President Obama called it, “the Oscars for great community colleges.” The Aspen Prize honors institutions with outstanding student outcomes in six areas: teaching and learning, certificate and degree completion, transfer to four-year institutions, workforce, equitable outcomes for students of color and low-income students, and equitable college access. It also assesses a seventh area: leadership and culture, which Aspen’s research has shown distinguishes community colleges that achieve high, improving, and equitable levels of student success.

By lifting up models that help students succeed both during and after college, the Aspen Prize aims to celebrate exceptional colleges; advance a comprehensive definition of excellence and equity in student success; and stimulate replication of effective, scalable, and systemic reforms.

To learn more about the College Excellence Program’s work, visit highered.aspeninstitute.org

To explore some of the research that the Aspen Prize has informed, see our **Dual Enrollment Playbook** (as.pn/DualEnrollmentPlaybook), **Transfer Playbook** (as.pn/TransferPlaybook), and **Workforce Playbook** (as.pn/WorkforcePlaybook)

The Aspen Institute gratefully acknowledges the following charitable institutions’ leadership and support for the 2023 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence:



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
CONGRATULATES THE FINALISTS FOR

The 2023 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence

WINNERS:

Amarillo College

Imperial Valley College

FINALISTS:

Broward College

Hostos Community College

Kingsborough Community College

Moorpark College

Northwest Iowa Community College

San Jacinto College

South Puget Sound Community College

Southwest Wisconsin Technical College

To learn more, visit as.pn/prize

Value-Driven Excellence: The Transformative Power of Community Colleges

The Aspen Prize is always a cause for celebration. It gives us a moment to honor the accomplishments of excellent community colleges—those that make sure their students succeed while in college and after graduating. But this time, the celebration feels different.

Following a decade-long decline, community college enrollments dropped dramatically over the past three years. Further declines loom as high school student demographics evolve. Labor markets too have changed. Today, those without a college degree can earn better wages than they could just a year or two ago, with fast-food, warehouse, and retail jobs in some cities paying over \$20 per hour. While the research is clear on the long-term value of a college degree, better short-term wages are likely pulling away prospective students. Plus, societal divisions seem to be accelerating. In the past two years, politicians, board members, and campus constituencies have increasingly called upon college leaders to do things aligned with external priorities that are not always consistent with what college leaders believe to be best for their students.

At a time of such turbulence, the accomplishments of this year's Aspen Prize winners and finalists are especially impressive and important. They offer lessons on what's

possible when a college commits to delivering on its promises, both to students and the broader community. What the 10 colleges profiled here have in common is an unwavering commitment to caring about their students. Caring about them so that the benefits of a

high-quality education are extended to all, including those who have historically been underserved by higher education. Caring about them by ensuring students not only graduate, but earn credentials with value in transfer and the workforce. Caring about them so that lives are changed through the power of education.

At a time of such turbulence, the accomplishments of this year's Aspen Prize winners and finalists are especially impressive and important.

Delivering Credentials of Value

Research shows that students enroll in college for one reason above all others: to get a good job and advance a career. For community college students, there are two paths to that goal:



Amarillo College | Amarillo, TX

a workforce credential that provides the skills needed for a good job right away, or an associate degree that prepares them to efficiently transfer and attain a bachelor's degree (the vast majority of which, research shows, lead to good jobs).

Leaders, faculty, and staff at Aspen Prize-winner **Imperial Valley College** have been working shoulder-to-shoulder with K-12 and four-year partners to strengthen the value proposition of higher education by expanding access to valuable bachelor's degrees. In a region with some of California's lowest bachelor's attainment rates, Imperial Valley advisors have worked closely with high schoolers to choose dual enrollment college courses that are embedded in clear paths to associate degrees that, in turn, pave the way to bachelor's degrees. At the same time, Imperial Valley leaders have partnered with multiple four-year universities to develop bachelor's pathways in the fields of science, technology, and math—always prioritizing pathways that lead to good (and needed) jobs in the region. The goals are clear: Students need bachelor's degrees to advance into promising career fields, and the community needs bachelor's degree graduates to build a bright future for the valley. The results are equally clear: Transfer rates are steadily increasing at Imperial Valley, and over half of students who transfer complete bachelor's degrees within six years, well above the national average.

Aspen Prize-winner **Amarillo College** also innovates to increase the value delivered to graduates and to the region. To address a nursing shortage, Amarillo developed a partnership with another college to expand nursing program enrollment and place graduates at short-staffed rural hospitals across the

Texas Panhandle. Because many students need a quick path to a life-improving credential, the college has also established a new satellite campus that prepares students—via 10-week sprints—for good jobs in cybersecurity, software development, data analytics, AWS cloud computing, and technical project management. The impact? Amarillo students, on average, earn over \$41,000 the year after graduation, a substantial improvement over what graduates earned just two years ago, and 37 percent more than other new hires in the region.

Developing Cultures of Care

Leaders at both Imperial Valley and Amarillo understand that many students—including disproportionate numbers of Black, Hispanic, and low-income students—never complete a credential because personal circumstances and academic challenges stand in the way. Neither college uses that reality as an excuse to accept poor student outcomes. Instead, both have established a palpable, genuine, and actionable culture of care—a culture in which everyone on campus does everything in their power to help every student succeed.



Imperial Valley College | Imperial, CA

At Amarillo, that culture translates into the goal of removing at least one poverty-based barrier for every student. This means offering a well-stocked food pantry, a robust pool of emergency aid, mobile WiFi access when COVID restricted library use, and a childcare resource center stocked with diapers, formula, and other necessities. The culture is also reflected in substantial academic supports, including tutoring, a common intervention that Amarillo has made particularly effective by making it pervasive and inescapable. Why has Amarillo invested so much in these and

other supports?

Because data showed they make a huge difference in the number of students who complete.

Imperial Valley likewise delivers impressive non-academic supports—

Both winners have established a palpable, genuine, and actionable culture of care—a culture in which everyone on campus does everything in their power to help every student succeed.

including tiny houses for former foster youth and migrant worker-friendly course options—but more impressive is a change in how they attend to students’ academic needs. As is the case at many colleges, Imperial Valley had for many years set the course schedule by tweaking the previous year’s based on faculty needs and classroom capacity. When college leaders realized that too many classes were not offered at times that worked for students—and some critical classes were not scheduled often enough—they changed their approach. The college now works with department chairs to develop schedules that prioritize the classes students need on the days and times students prefer. A newly centralized

process then advances student graduation by eliminating conflicts between courses in different departments that are essential for students to complete programs of study.

The cultures of care at Amarillo and Imperial Valley have produced exceptional results, including some of the nation’s fastest-improving completion rates. Over the past four years, the three-year graduation and transfer rate has increased 8 percentage points at Amarillo and 12 percentage points at Imperial Valley.

Succeeding No Matter the Circumstances

This year’s Aspen Prize winners are different in many ways. One is in a blue state, the other red; one is more transfer-oriented, while the other delivers more workforce credentials. But what they—and this year’s other eight finalists—have in common is a singular focus on making sure every student succeeds. They demonstrate that—no matter the circumstances—a focused plan for scaled and systemic reform, paired with a culture of care, can dramatically improve student outcomes.

It’s important to remember: Those outcomes do not just translate into numbers on a spreadsheet. They represent the activation of the talents of thousands more diverse students. They represent better prospects for fulfilling lives and careers. They represent lives changed and communities strengthened.

We at Aspen are grateful for the lessons the finalist colleges have taught us, and hope the field will find inspiration in their accomplishments.

Josh Wyner

Founder & Executive Director,
Aspen Institute College Excellence Program

Amarillo College



HIGHLIGHTS

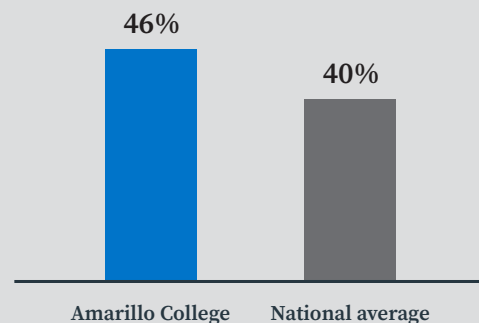
- **Serves mid-size city in Texas Panhandle and large surrounding agricultural region**
- **12,000 students**
- **50% students of color, majority Hispanic**
- **Guided by commitment to “love students to success,” provides exceptional student supports for both academic and basic needs**
- ★ **Over four years, the overall graduation and transfer rate rose 8 percentage points; the rate for students of color rose 9 percentage points**

In 2021, Amarillo College was recognized as a Rising Star among that year’s Aspen Prize finalists. The college had a remarkable record of addressing poverty-related barriers to student success and was steadily improving graduation rates. Over the past two years, Amarillo has not just maintained those reforms, but dedicated itself to doing much more, consistently improving and scaling effective practices so many more students succeed in college and after graduating.

Amarillo College is guided by President Russell Lowery-Hart, a lifelong resident of the area. Now in his ninth year leading the college, Lowery-Hart is known nationally for his unrelenting focus on creating a community of care. As he puts it, “I asked our students to design the perfect college for them, and the two things they kept identifying were people who would help them and people who would care for them. What our students need from us is strong academics, but wrapped in the personal. And there is nothing more personal than love. As a college we’ve committed to loving our students, because that is what they need most from us.”

And Amarillo delivers on that commitment. With a goal of removing at least one poverty-based barrier for every student, the college does some of the nation’s best work removing the life barriers that threaten student success. The college has invested heavily in a food pantry, emergency aid, and mental health counseling, which continues even after students transfer to the nearby university. According to Lowery-Hart: “We’ve hired social workers; we have robust emergency aid systems. We have physical and mental health connections for our students—and for their dependents.”

Three-year graduation and transfer rate for students of color, 2017–2019



The community of care at Amarillo has a broader purpose: to get students into and through strong programs of study aligned to good post-graduation opportunities. Amarillo recently launched Innovation Outpost, an impressive new workforce initiative designed to move students quickly into high-demand jobs in the region. Hosted at a new satellite campus, Innovation Outpost prepares students through 10-week sprints for high-wage jobs in fields such as cybersecurity, software development, data analytics, and technical project management.

These services and onramps to good jobs are especially important given Amarillo’s service area, which includes both a city with many low-wage, low-skill service and transportation jobs and a largely agricultural area that extends into 26 counties. The college student body is just about half students of

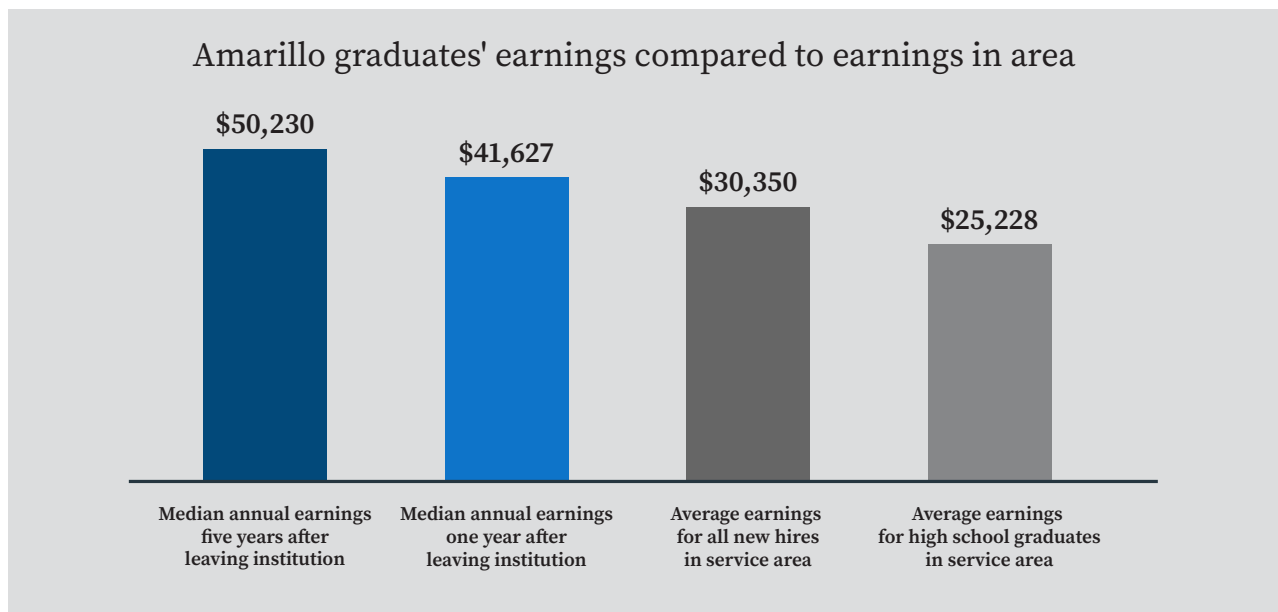
color, and 39 percent of first-time, full-time students are Pell grant recipients.

Programs like Innovation Outpost build on a strong baseline of excellent workforce programs that deliver jobs with good salaries: Amarillo College graduates earn, on average, \$11,000 more one year after graduation than all new hires in the region.

Understanding that many good jobs require a bachelor’s degree, Amarillo College has focused on improving outcomes for students who transfer to nearby West Texas A&M University, which receives 80 percent of Amarillo’s transfer students. After a year of structured partnership

meetings, the two institutions are now better aligning course expectations, improving faculty and program leader relationships, and collaborating on advising strategies and student communications.

“What our students need from us is strong academics, but wrapped in the personal. And there is nothing more personal than love. As a college we’ve committed to loving our students, because that is what they need most from us.”



Amarillo's focus on post-graduation success is impressive. The work the college does to get students there is equally so. One of the college's most impactful reforms is making tutoring pervasive and unavoidable. All students are required to use tutoring services at least once a semester.

Non-credit developmental education has been replaced with gateway math and English courses, for which students have a tutoring requirement.

Finally, any student taking a course essential for graduation (including required math and English courses) who scores below a faculty-determined cutoff on an exam is referred to mandatory tutoring. Tutoring center hours and services are studied by institutional researchers to better understand what works and adjusted to meet the real-time needs of students. As a result, the tutoring center is

Amarillo's focus on post-graduation success is impressive. The work the college does to get students there is equally so.

open Monday through Saturday till 8pm and to 11pm during crunch times in the semester.

Another example of data-informed change with the aim of stronger and more equitable completion outcomes: course scheduling. When college data revealed that most students

who fail to complete a course struggle most around the halfway point in a 16-week semester, Amarillo decided to shift to eight-week terms. According to Lowery-Hart, "We made a lot of implementation mistakes at the outset. But students in the 25 percent or so of

classes that voluntarily moved to an eight-week schedule showed about a 12 percent better completion rate. So, we decided to go all-in, and it's had a tremendous impact on acceleration."

Other completion innovations have begun to take hold. A student engagement platform



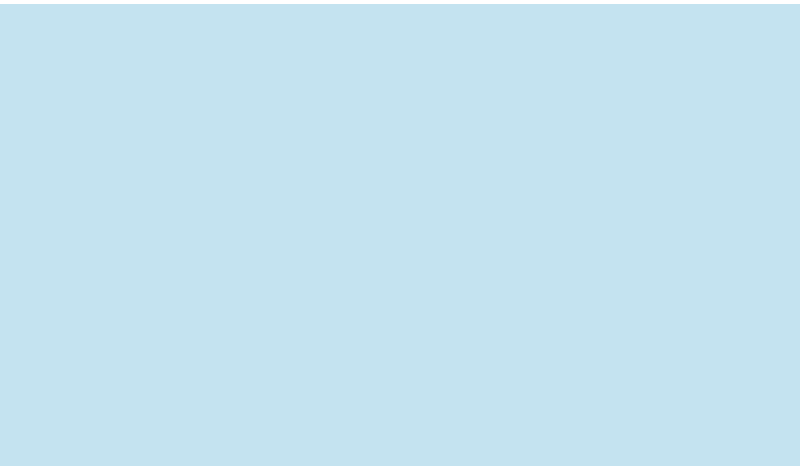
was rolled out successfully and is now used regularly by students, faculty, and advisors. Student-advisor ratios have been cut from 900:1 to below 500:1, and advisors now specialize in a specific set of majors and career pathways. The college uses attendance as an early indicator of student difficulties, with absences triggering automatic notifications to advisors to reach out and offer help.

Amarillo's completion efforts have led to extraordinary improvements in graduation rates. But Amarillo leaders, faculty, and staff have not taken that as a sign to slow down. When leaders realized improved success rates in credit programs didn't translate into better outcomes for many of the working adult students who entered the college in Adult Basic Education (ABE), they took bold steps to align the college's credit programs and non-credit offerings, including ABE. With this shift, adult students get the support they need to advance quickly and successfully to for-credit courses and employment. Atypical for a community

college, Amarillo ABE students have full access to campus resources and services. Likewise atypical, about 18 percent of students enrolled in non-credit ABE at the college transition to for-credit courses, far greater than most colleges' conversion rate.

President Lowery-Hart acknowledges that there is more to do to strengthen the college's contribution in the community. When he looks to the future, he hopes to increase not just the number of Amarillo students transferring to West Texas A&M, but the number who successfully complete bachelor's degrees. He also wants the college to expand workforce options to help meet students' needs and those of employers.

For Lowery-Hart, Amarillo College's trajectory is clear. "It doesn't cost us anything to care for people. It only helps us. This college is the heartbeat of the community. As Amarillo College goes, so goes our community."



Imperial Valley College



First-time Aspen Prize Finalist

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Two hours east of San Diego, near the borders with Mexico and Arizona**
- **10,800 students**
- **93% Hispanic**
- **60-70% of local high school graduates enroll at the college**
- ★ **12 percentage point increase in three-year graduation and transfer rate between 2015 and 2019**

For nearly a decade, Imperial Valley College leaders have been on a journey to better the lives of their students—and their community. The college serves a 4,500-square-mile area along the Mexico border, with some of the nation's highest rates of poverty and unemployment and lowest rates of college attainment. Over half of Imperial Valley students receive Pell grants, and about three in four have family earnings low enough to be eligible for tuition-free enrollment through a California College Promise Grant. Against this challenging backdrop, Imperial Valley's leaders have succeeded in strengthening the college-going culture for an entire region.

Imperial Valley has created one of the nation's most effective partnerships with local K-12 systems. "Quite frankly, for many years, the perception of the college among K-12 personnel and in the community was not good," according to Victor Torres, Imperial Valley's Associate Dean of Workforce Development and

Non-Traditional Instruction. "Imperial Valley was seen by many as a last choice."

Torres asked: "How could we change that perception? First, we said, 'We need you to come to our campus and see for yourselves what goes on here.' We started bringing educators on site—counselors, administrators, superintendents, teachers, career education

instructors." These visits gave college leaders the chance to show their K-12 counterparts the quality of college instruction, the high expectations of students and faculty, and the commitment to completion and success after graduation.

Over time, this partnership grew stronger. The college included K-12 partners in strategic conversations about

access to higher education, and teachers at the high schools began to build college-going programming into the high school curriculum. Now, students in the 10 area high schools are not just made aware of college but make

By the time students graduate high school, many have already attended an orientation and registered for Imperial Valley classes in the fall.

plans to attain a college degree. In 11th grade, students hear presentations from college counselors about different program pathways; in 12th grade, they complete an application and the FAFSA; and in the spring of their senior year, they meet with a college counselor to create an initial educational plan.

By the time students graduate, many have already attended an orientation and registered for Imperial Valley classes in the fall. The results are remarkable: between 60 and 70 percent of students who attend the local school district matriculate at Imperial Valley after high school—and that number is even higher for dual enrollment students.

According to Torres, the perception of the college in the region has changed dramatically—partly because relationships with educators, students, and families have changed.

“Students may have been visited by an Imperial Valley staff member three, four, five times by the time they are planning for college. We’re able to position ourselves to be a first choice, not the last choice.” Students start to develop a sense of belonging at Imperial Valley long before they enroll.

Of course, expanding college access without ensuring college success would not move many people out of poverty. Imperial Valley has worked hard to improve student success and achieved some of the fastest-growing completion rates in the country.

To build on the planning students do during high school, the college has scaled efforts

to make sure students solidify their sense of purpose after entry. Onboarding for new students includes creating a first-semester plan, which 80 percent of students complete. During the first semester, counselors help students develop a full education plan—a plan designed not just to get students through an associate degree program, but to make sure the degree they earn prepares them for a specific four-year university degree or for direct entry to a

career. After several years of effort, 60 percent of Imperial Valley students now complete these plans.

Robust tutoring helps ensure students remain on these plans. Fifty trained students work in the Teaching and Learning Center, tutoring their peers in all subjects. Tutors are also embedded in nearly 100 classes, an investment the college decided to fully fund in the budget after

a grant-funded pilot found that success rates rose an average of 10 to 15 percentage points in classes with embedded tutors.

Improved completion rates are also achieved through field-leading work to address students’ non-academic needs. The college runs a food pantry, provides vouchers for on-campus meals, and maintains a clothing closet, daycare facility, and veterans center. In a creative response to the housing challenges faced by former foster youth, the college constructed 26 tiny homes on campus for these vulnerable students—a practical solution and a point of pride for Imperial Valley.

The college also works hard to make sure students get the courses they need to graduate.

“Students may have been visited by an Imperial Valley staff member three, four, five times by the time they are planning for college. We’re able to position ourselves to be a first choice, not the last choice.”

A few years ago, college leaders recognized the traditional approach to setting course schedules, which began with faculty preferences, was not working. Too many students were having trouble finding courses at times that fit with their work or family responsibilities—a challenge that, in some cases, was leading them to leave college. In response, the college pivoted to a student-centered model for setting schedules that are more accommodating to working adults. Now the college centrally creates a schedule that includes many more evening and weekend courses. Once the course schedule is set, faculty choose the courses and times they want to teach, based on seniority.

The college has also redesigned short-term programs to offer part-time options for working students. For example, the state-designed Fire Academy program typically requires students to attend classes full time, Monday through Friday, 9 am to 5 pm, for four months. Because many

Imperial Valley students work, college leaders lobbied the state for the flexibility to offer the academy over the course of a year. Now students can attend evening courses two days a week and on Saturdays. Similar changes have been made to the corrections program schedule, and the paramedic program recently started to accept part-time students for the first time. Changes like these have contributed to increased enrollment and faster progress to degrees.

Increase in three-year graduation and transfer rate, 2015 to 2019

12 percentage points

6 percentage points

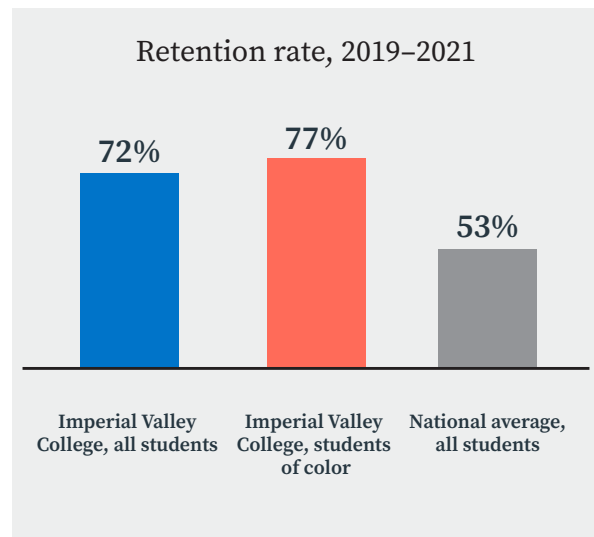
Imperial Valley College

National average

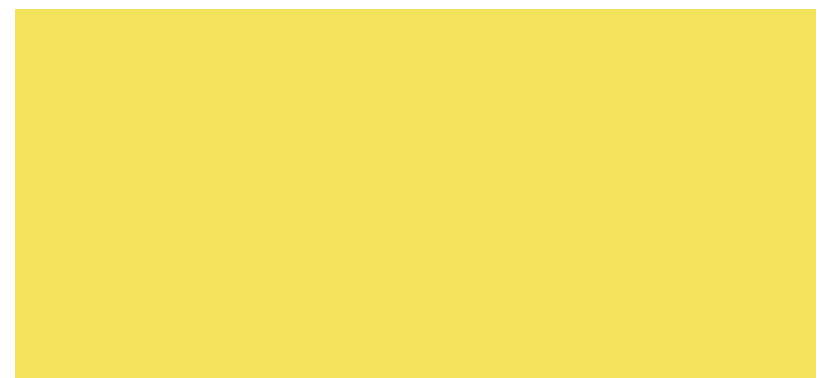


Imperial Valley knows that most of its degrees are designed as a first step toward a bachelor's. Leaders and faculty have developed strong transfer partnerships with several four-year institutions, some in California and others in neighboring states. A longstanding transfer partnership with a regional campus of San Diego State offers a strong pathway to teaching

jobs, and college leaders have worked to expand access to high-value pathways in STEM and other fields. They have also partnered with Missouri's Columbia College to offer a fully online business degree. Clear 2+2 program maps and a well-staffed transfer center that advises students about their options ensure that students transfer efficiently and have a better chance of earning a bachelor's degree.



Imperial Valley's greatest strength may be the commitment of leaders, faculty, and staff to changing an entire region. Understanding the college is part of a broader ecosystem, leaders have built strong relationships with partners, attracting grant funds for innovation and for new programs and policies. It's in these ways that Imperial Valley has skillfully made remarkable progress toward not just its ambitious student success goals, but toward building a stronger and more prosperous community.





HIGHLIGHTS

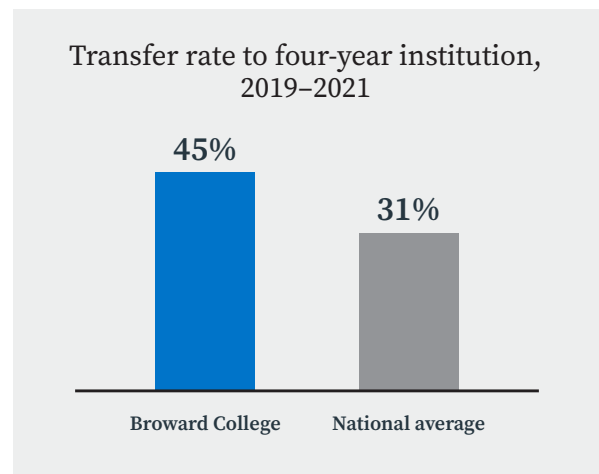
- **Three main campuses in the vibrant South Florida economic region**
 - **57,000 students**
 - **69% students of color**
 - **Highly effective transfer programs supported through guaranteed admission at and colocation with area universities**
- ★ **Bold partnership to bring college to low-income neighborhoods has enrolled 3,500 new students and produced 2,000 new industry certifications and certificates of completion**

Broward College is one of the largest community colleges in the nation, enrolling 57,000 students and employing about 4,000 faculty and staff. For such a large school, the pursuit of excellence requires clear goals, strong leadership, and effective mechanisms for defining and monitoring progress. Thanks to all of the above, Broward has succeeded in prioritizing and implementing change at scale—change that delivers strong outcomes to its many students and their families.

Among these impressive reforms is Broward’s early work on guided pathways, which resulted in upticks in completion rates. The college created eight career-oriented pathways (meta-majors) that provide students with clear maps to associate degrees, certificates, and transfer. Each pathway has customized advising and career guidance as well as tailored gateway math courses.

Broward College was also an early innovator in streamlining transfer to local public universities. Transfer pathways to Florida International and Florida Atlantic universities

are co-branded and widely publicized. FAU even has a building on Broward’s largest campus where students can complete a bachelor’s degree in certain fields. Students who declare interest in FIU or FAU are guaranteed admission with junior standing at either institution after they complete their associate degree. Before they transfer, Broward students have access to the universities’ advisors, support services, libraries, and sporting events. These connections and supports contribute to Broward’s very high rates of transfer and bachelor’s attainment.



When President Gregory Haile assumed his role in 2018, he was acutely aware that while Broward County was booming (with an unemployment rate under 3 percent) many county residents were struggling, living at or near the poverty line without the education or skills needed to improve their incomes. According to Mildred Coyne, the college's senior vice president for workforce education and innovation, "We recognized that in 11 ZIP codes, the reality was quite different. We were missing a large group of people who lived in neighborhoods or cities where unemployment ranged from 9 to 15 percent." And data revealed to college leaders that just 3,000 of Broward's 60,000-plus students were coming from those areas.

The response: Broward UP (Unlimited Potential), an ambitious outreach strategy to bring educational opportunity to underserved potential students in their own communities. Starting from an initial partnership with the Urban League of Broward County, the college now partners with municipalities and nonprofits to secure public spaces such as libraries and community centers for educational programming. Broward starts with free courses and wraparound supports to help individuals get their footing in higher education and see themselves as college-bound learners. The result: Since 2018, more than 30 partner organizations have signed on, and over 3,500 new students have enrolled.

Broward has also made an impressive large-scale investment in non-academic supports, including

a food pantry, clothes closet, and emergency grants. Particularly innovative is the college's response when student surveys identified

When it became clear that students using the vouchers succeeded at higher rates, Broward scaled the program, providing many thousands of students with free rides to school.

transportation as a huge barrier to completion: The college piloted a system of offering free Lyft vouchers to students. When it became clear that students using the vouchers succeeded at higher rates, Broward scaled the program, providing many thousands of students free rides to school.

Advancing reforms in any institution, but particularly a large one, requires a mechanism for aligning resources with desired goals. Broward has implemented "Greater Impact Budgeting," an approach that has enabled the school to make choices needed to improve student success. A decision to eliminate the athletic program enabled reallocation of resources to hiring 40 new advisors, reducing the student-advisor ratio from 700:1 to 286:1. Additional savings were invested in the Lyft voucher program. In the years to come, this consensus-driven, data-informed process should be a steady source of both innovation and scaling of effective practices at Broward College.



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Serves the South Bronx, NY**
- **Over 9,000 students**
- **90% students of color, majority Hispanic**
- **Robust support services to address student basic needs**
- ★ **Hostos has strengthened its systems for hiring faculty with strong teaching skills and ensuring faculty continue to improve their practices**

Founded in 1968 after community leaders advocated for a college to serve the South Bronx, Hostos Community College has long been a force for college access and economic mobility. One of seven community colleges in the City University of New York (CUNY) system, Hostos serves one of the poorest Congressional districts in the country:

Close to two-thirds of students receive a Pell grant, double the rate at community colleges nationally.

At Hostos, a strong culture of care and a commitment to combating poverty translate into strong non-academic supports for students. The college offers emergency funding to help with extraordinary expenses, a food pantry, a professional wardrobe closet to use on job interviews, a subsidized childcare center, and a One Stop Center that connects students to external supports and services such as legal help and federal benefits.

Academic offerings are also tailored to the day-to-day realities of the student body. Recognizing that financially strapped students often have limited time for school, Hostos developed a vibrant continuing education division that has attracted a sizable adult student population.

With extensive input from campus and

community partners, the college created nine continuing education programs that enable students to improve their job prospects while also earning college-level credits that transfer into six longer-term programs of study. Programs meet real regional labor market needs—including in business, healthcare, and IT—so that students can move quickly into employment while also

Programs meet real regional labor market needs—including in business, healthcare, and IT—so that students can move quickly into employment while also keeping open paths to future high-demand credentials.

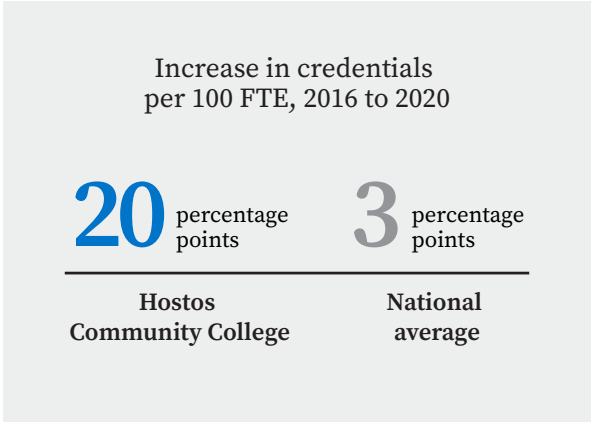
keeping open paths to future high-demand credentials. In spring 2022, 121 students who started in continuing education graduated from longer-term credit programs.

Hostos leaders understand that academic and workforce programs are only as strong as the classroom instruction within them. So, they have worked to strengthen the systems for hiring faculty with strong teaching skills—and making sure that all faculty continue to improve their practices. During the interview process, Hostos requires a teaching demonstration and includes students in the evaluation. Once hired, faculty receive continued professional development and feedback after peer observations every year.

Former President David Gomez was intent on making Hostos a “place to go” rather than a “place to end up.”

A new annual goal-setting and self-reflection process for academic departments also contributes to a culture that values teaching. Each academic department sets goals for faculty development, student progress through degree programs, student belonging, and space and infrastructure usage. The provost and department chair meet weekly and at the end of the year to measure progress. Leaders plan to use this system to solidify a culture of continuous improvement at the college.

Former President David Gomez was intent on making Hostos a “place to go” rather than a “place to end up.” This commitment is shared by new President Cocco De Filippis, who recently began a five-year strategic planning process to deepen the campus-wide sense of common purpose; set objectives for learning, completion, and workforce development; and track progress in service of improving student outcomes.



Kingsborough Community College



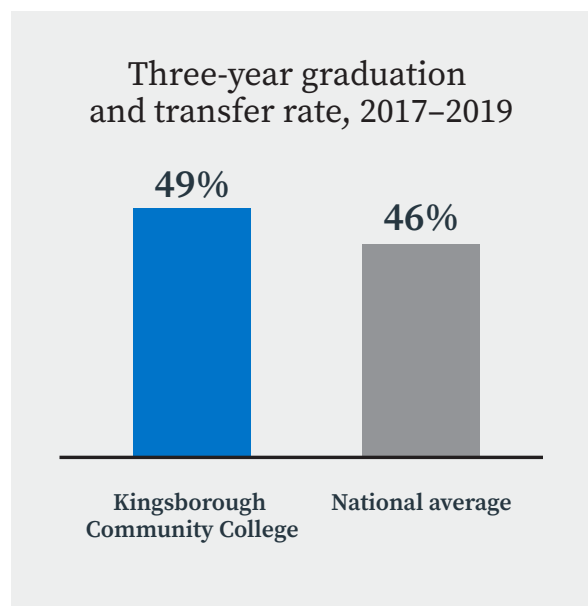
HIGHLIGHTS

- **The only public community college in Brooklyn, NY**
- **Nearly 20,000 students**
- **Intentional efforts have been made to ensure that students reflect Brooklyn's diversity: 32% white, 26% Black, 21% Hispanic, 16% Asian or Pacific Islander**
- **Between 6,000 and 10,000 high school students take courses at Kingsborough**
- ★ **Enrolls a third of all students in the highly effective ASAP program**

Kingsborough Community College is in Brooklyn's far southeast corner, with views of two New York bays and the Atlantic Ocean. Though it sits in an isolated location, the college is seen by many as a haven for learning new ideas and skills, and for broadening economic opportunity.

Kingsborough has a rich history of innovating to improve student access and success. In the early 2000s, the college revamped its recruitment and partnership strategies with the goal of increasing diversity. It worked: 20 years later, Kingsborough's student body continues to reflect the borough's diversity. The college was a pioneer in implementing learning communities, a cohort strategy that improved student retention. Kingsborough was also the first community college in the nation (now followed by many others) to welcome on campus a non-profit called Single Stop that helps students access financial and public benefits, which can help them persist in college.

Kingsborough's most impressive effort to prioritize student success has been its commitment to implementing CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) at scale. About one-third of Kingsborough students are enrolled in ASAP, a far higher percentage than at any other CUNY community



college. ASAP combines accelerated developmental coursework, a robust set of non-academic supports, and dedicated advising—plus reduced-cost textbooks and free transit passes. For all students—including students of color—ASAP leads to far better completion and transfer rates than experienced by other students at the college.

The college also offers several smaller specialized success programs, including one in allied health, a strong TRIO program, and a Black Male Initiative. Up to 40 percent of students enroll in ASAP and these other programs—a significant factor in the college’s high completion and transfer rates.

A college-wide commitment to reviewing student learning outcomes at both the course and program levels also contributes to student success. Nearly all community colleges have defined student learning outcomes, but Kingsborough has gone a step further by weaving course and program outcomes into its culture of, and systems for, improving teaching and student support. Likewise, faculty leaders use program-level outcomes to ensure alignment with employers and to maintain excellence in liberal arts programs.

Since becoming president in 2018, Claudia Schrader has focused on strengthening workforce development programming, increasing access, and expanding equitable outcomes. Recent initiatives have focused on new employment opportunities in green energy fields, such as wind and solar, and on outreach to new groups of potential students, both through partnerships with local high schools and new degree pathways for working adults.

Kingsborough has a rich history of innovating to improve student access and success.

More established are Kingsborough’s efforts to expand higher education access for area high schoolers: In any given year, between 6,000 and 10,000 dual enrollment students

take courses from the college. Many are in CUNY-system or New York state programs, including one that offers college courses to high school students

in danger of dropping out. Recognizing that the large enrollment of high school students offers an opportunity to further advance college attainment, college leaders are making plans to help dual enrollment students choose a path of study and take aligned courses so they are even better prepared for college and post-graduation success.



Moorpark College



First-time Aspen Prize Finalist

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Located north of Los Angeles suburbs**
- **Over 20,000 students**
- **40% students of color, majority Hispanic**
- **All degrees, certificates, and non-credit programs organized under eight meta-majors**
- ★ **Awards more discipline-based Associate Degrees for Transfer than any other California community college**

Moorpark achieves strong levels of student success on many fronts. Among this year's Aspen Prize finalists, Moorpark has the highest rate of students' completing college-level math and English courses in their first year, a strong indicator that students are on a solid path towards graduation. The college has one of the best records in California for ensuring that students complete their Associate Degrees for Transfer, a statewide set of degrees that smooth the path to bachelor's attainment. And 59 percent of Moorpark students who transfer do earn a bachelor's degree, higher than the national average of 47 percent.

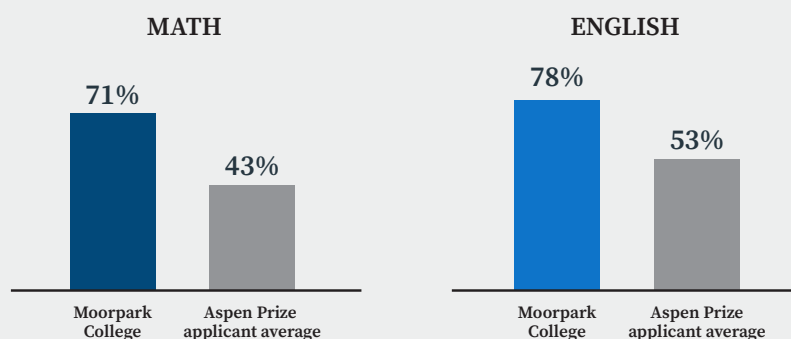
Lastly, Moorpark's graduation rates are improving, including for the part-time students who often struggle most to attain credentials.

How has Moorpark been able to help their students advance? To start, developmental education courses have been entirely replaced by "corequisite" courses, which are college-level courses coupled with additional supports for those who

need them. Under the new model, 71 percent of first-time-in-college students completed gateway math within their first year and 78 percent completed English, very high rates that make completion more likely. Another contributor to success: Advising is organized into "success teams" that check in with all students at 15- and 30-credit benchmarks so students are guided toward completion and develop plans for what comes next.

Since 2016, Moorpark has embraced the guided pathways strategy of providing clearer paths, structures, and supports for choosing and

Percent of students who completed the gateway course in their first year, 2018–2019



staying with a program of study. Program maps were created for all degree programs—and, importantly, they are being used by students and advisors alike. All credit and non-credit programs have been clustered into a limited number of meta-majors, and onboarding is wholly focused on choosing a program of study and crafting an educational plan by the end of a student’s first semester.

In part because of these reforms, the college has a well-deserved reputation for putting students first. College leaders are proud of the institution’s “dialogue-rich” culture among faculty and staff, a culture supported by President Julius Sokenu’s open communication style. Twice a month he gives a campus-wide update, spotlighting programs’ successes and welcoming open discussion about current challenges.

Another contributor to that culture: The way in which the college has reimagined senior leadership. There are eight deans of student learning at the college, and each oversees both academic and student affairs divisions, plus some operational units. For example, one dean oversees English, student conduct, and student life; another oversees support for students with disabilities, athletics, kinesiology, library, math, distance education, and teaching and learning. The deans rotate function areas every few years. This unique system increases collaboration and reduces the divide between academic and student services departments.

At Moorpark, all departments—academic, career services and counseling, and operational units—set annual goals aligned with at least

Program maps were created for all degree programs—and, importantly, they are being used by students and advisors alike.

one metric in the college’s strategic plan. The resulting body of strategically aligned goals allows college leaders to identify thematic focus areas for the college. The current focus on work-based learning and quantitative literacy emerged from this process.

Dialogue, collaboration, and review. This structure gives Moorpark a strong foundation for communicating about and implementing a culture of change that puts students—and their educational and economic success—first.



Northwest Iowa Community College



First-time Aspen Prize Finalist

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Located in Sheldon, Iowa with a five-county service area**
- **2,700 students**
- **Very workforce oriented; more than 2/3 of awards granted are in Career and Technical Education**
- **74% three-year graduation and transfer rate is the highest among Prize finalists**
- ★ **97% job placement rate for graduates**

Serving a rural region dominated by agriculture and manufacturing, Northwest Iowa Community College faces challenges common to many similarly situated colleges: declining K-12 enrollment, a limited economic and employment base, and difficulties recruiting staff and faculty.

Yet the college has found ways to continuously expand opportunity, most notably by ensuring that students graduate. Northwest Iowa's 74 percent three-year completion and transfer rate is remarkable—and no accident. Upon entry, no student is allowed to enroll as "undecided": They must enroll in one of the college's 40 programs. Faculty, staff, and leaders are united in a commitment to keeping students on a path, monitoring progress, and intervening early to help those who are struggling. Advising is intrusive and individualized: The student-to-advisor ratio is a low 100:1. Many colleges employ software to monitor student progress, but at Northwest Iowa that software is integrated into day-to-day advising operations. Technology is used intentionally to further strengthen the close connections between faculty, staff, and

students. A weekly grade report, in tandem with faculty and staff flags, helps advisors determine when and how to intervene.

Northwest Iowa's 74 percent three-year completion and transfer rate is remarkable—and no accident.

Northwest Iowa knows its future depends upon long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with both the region's K-12 systems and the local employer base. Growing these partnerships has enabled the college to be at the center of the region's educational and economic strategy, and to overcome obstacles related to distance and demography.

A great example of partnership with K-12: Each year Northwest Iowa hosts 1,800 8th graders and 1,200 11th graders from its vast service area for on-campus Career Days. Those are impressive numbers for a rural-serving community college. High school

juniors and seniors are invited to participate in “Thunder Fridays,” which include a campus tour and meetings with faculty, advisors, and students. The college has added “Latino Thunder Fridays,” a Spanish-language version tailored to the region’s fast-growing Hispanic population. More than half of high schoolers who participate subsequently enroll at Northwest Iowa; that number is even higher for students who attend Latino Thunder Fridays. The college also has a robust dual enrollment program, which is so popular that it serves almost as many students as the college’s other programs.

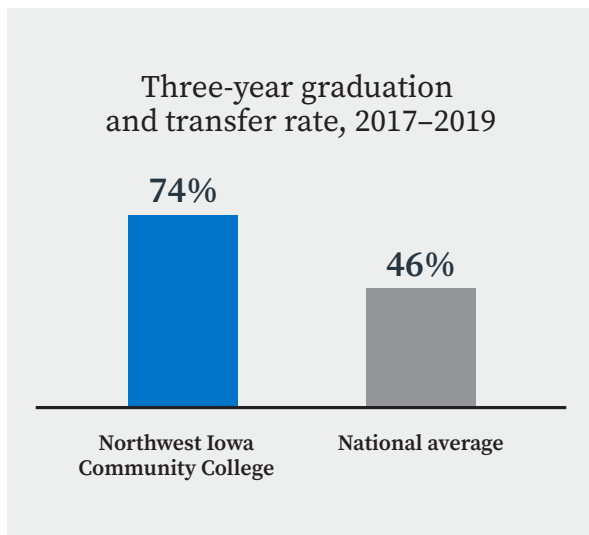
Partnerships with local employers start with active advisory boards that give employers the opportunity to provide feedback on curriculum, program content, and the skills and attitudes they seek among college graduates. Northwest Iowa’s partnerships go further than most: The college works closely with employers to create work-based learning opportunities for students, often thinking creatively to design internships that serve a community need while

also helping students apply their classroom learning. Northwest Iowa students reap the benefits: A large majority enroll in the college’s Career and Technical Education programs, and CTE graduates have an amazing 97 percent job placement rate. In their first job after college, Northwest Iowa graduates earn about a third more than the average new hire in the region.

College leaders and personnel have created a community that is united on behalf of its region’s residents, businesses, and, above all, its students. “There are many blessings to being a rural college,” says Mariah Oliver, Northwest Iowa’s Student Support Coordinator. “Everyone recognizes how we make a difference in the

community. We’re providing the training for all our EMTs and our firefighters. Our faculty are training our nurses and the employees operating our manufacturing facilities. Our people are working with local business owners to make sure they are getting their needs met.”

More than half of high schoolers who participate subsequently enroll at Northwest Iowa; that number is even higher for students who attend Latino Thunder Fridays.



HIGHLIGHTS

- Serves the diverse Houston metropolitan area
- 43,000 students
- 69% students of color, majority Hispanic
- 20 percentage point drop in students enrolling in general studies between 2015–2016 and 2019–2020 due to advising intervention
- ★ Reduction in average number of credits per associate degree from 90 to 75 in four years

San Jacinto College’s impressive gains in student success begin with an exceptional leadership team. Chancellor Brenda Hellyer, who grew up in the Houston area, became San Jacinto’s Chancellor in 2009, just a few years after President and Deputy Chancellor Laurel Williamson arrived. Together, they have instilled across the institution a culture that encourages broad engagement in inquiry and research, a key contributor to the college’s achievement of stronger and more equitable student outcomes.

Those outcomes have been improving for nearly a decade. According to Dr. Williamson, the release of the book *Redesigning America’s Community Colleges* in 2015 was a major catalyst for improvements. Reading the book, college leaders recognized that San Jacinto was offering a “cafeteria model” of education that impeded students’

success. So, the college bought a copy of the book for every employee—faculty, administrators, and advisors, as well as government relations, marketing, and

operational staff—and ran discussion groups for 18 months. Staff were assigned specific sections to read, and trained facilitators led small group discussions about implications for the college. Participants were told that the process had a single goal: Concrete, scalable actions to improve student outcomes. It worked. Programs of study have been clarified and

advising has been revamped to encourage and support early program decisions.

In recent years, the college made it a priority to get all students on a pathway by the end of their first semester. And thanks to changes in advising practices, San Jacinto has achieved a nearly 20 percentage point decrease in the number of

**Participants
were told that
the process had
a single goal:
Concrete, scalable
actions to improve
student outcomes.
It worked.**

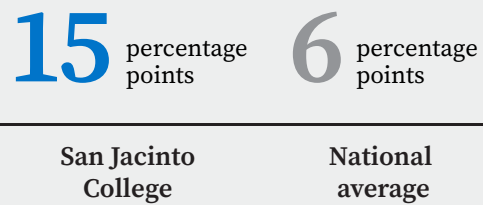
students who land in general studies, a program of study that is not well-aligned to success in transfer or the workforce after graduating. Along with this shift, the number of credits per associate degree fell from 90 to 75, a remarkable achievement in such a short period of time.

San Jacinto's commitment to students' progress extends past completion—the college is a national leader in workforce programming. The college has focused on expanding opportunity in three program clusters that are critically important to the regional economy: healthcare, petrochemical, and maritime. Like all colleges, industry advisory boards meet regularly to provide the college with feedback on its curriculum, equipment, and graduates' strengths and weaknesses. But Chancellor Hellyer took this a step further, creating Chancellor's Advisory Councils composed of industry CEOs and college leaders, designed to get the right people to the table for discussions about long-term industry needs and partnerships to address them.

San Jacinto's strength as a partner for employers is demonstrated in a remarkable investment from the global firm LyondellBasell, which in 2019 invested five million dollars in the creation of a Center for Petrochemical Energy and Technology on the college's campus. This training hub for the industry enables students to learn on state-of-the-art equipment, understand industry expectations, and build relationships that can help them find a job upon graduation. San Jacinto leaders also secured commitments from LyondellBasell to guarantee interviews for and hiring of qualified graduates.

San Jacinto is also focused on partnerships in transfer. The college has served as a regional leader of a transfer consortium of two- and four-year schools, through which faculty meet with their counterparts in four-year institutions

Increase in three-year graduation and transfer rate, 2015 to 2019



to identify misalignments and correct them by changing syllabi, exams, and textbooks. Recognizing that almost a quarter of all enrollments at San Jacinto are dual enrolled high school students, the college has focused recruitment and advising efforts on two large feeder schools with very high numbers of students of color. The college has also launched a Promise program making enrollment tuition-free for recent local high school graduates.

In the end, according to Chancellor Hellyer, "Working at the college is a kind of calling. It's a way to change lives and have a real impact in the community. Everything we focus on is about social and economic mobility so that we are an outstanding college in an outstanding community."



South Puget Sound Community College



First-time Aspen Prize Finalist

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Located in Olympia, the capital of Washington state**
- **Over 7,000 students**
- **75% of students in transfer-focused programs**
- **56% three-year graduation and transfer rate, 10 percentage points above national average**
- ★ **Personal Support Center is an impressively robust site for non-academic supports, basic needs**

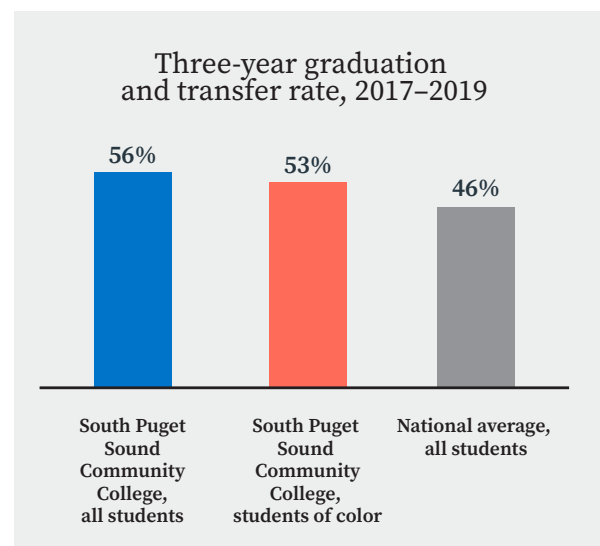
President Timothy Stokes has led South Puget Sound Community College since 2013 with a bold goal: “Our graduating cohort needs to demographically mirror the community we serve.” To this end, South Puget Sound has broadened access and worked inside and outside the classroom to support all students in their academic pursuits while, at the same time, addressing their non-academic needs.

Eliminating early barriers to student momentum and success is seen as essential at South Puget Sound. New students are required to take College and Career Success 101, a course that helps students explore their academic and career interests and the college’s offerings. The course culminates in each student formulating a full-program educational plan with the goal of either transfer or a technical credential. Students enroll at high rates in two optional follow up courses focused on either path, indicating that they find value in the required course.

So too has a priority been placed on improving classroom education. Faculty and staff have

access to a data dashboard with disaggregated completion and retention metrics, which almost all full-time faculty consulted to improve their teaching practice in the past year. All new tenure-track faculty participate in a three-year onboarding program, interacting with a cohort of peers to develop a common vision of inclusive pedagogy and to explore ways to use dashboard data for improvement.

College leaders recognize that many students face circumstances in their lives that stand in the



way of continuing their education. South Puget Sound’s Board Chair Rozanne Garman, the CEO of a successful construction firm, describes the importance of improved services at the college in personal terms: “After dropping out of the [dual enrollment] program in high school, I went back to South Puget Sound for my GED and high school diploma. I was 17, trying to navigate housing insecurity, trying to support myself, and trying to finish high school. They didn’t have wraparound services then, or mental health support. Things are very different today.” In 2017, the college established a well-staffed, centrally located Personal Support Center, offering a grocery-style food pantry, transportation and housing assistance, and referrals to county and state services. With public dollars and additional support from the college’s Foundation, the Center has become one of South Puget Sound’s strongest innovations.

But to get students to the finish line, they have to first come in the front door. To that end—and to President Stokes’ goal of a cohort that mirrors the community—South Puget Sound’s leaders have made it a priority to strengthen the college-going culture in local communities. One tactic: The college hosts an annual on-campus “Fire Summit” for Native American middle and high schoolers. According to one Native American student at the college: “I had never seen so many people like me in the same place at the same time—it made me feel like I belonged here.” The college employs a tribal liaison on a nearby reservation and supports a competency- and course-based high school diploma program there.

“I had never seen so many people like me in the same place at the same time—it made me feel like I belonged here.”

The college also partners extensively with local school districts, taking advantage of the statewide Running Start dual enrollment program to expose high school students in areas with low college-going rates to college-level work. In Yelm, a rural district 25 miles from campus, two bilingual navigators are employed by South Puget Sound, Running Start has expanded, and college instructors travel to Yelm to teach evening courses in Spanish and English. Students in this previously underserved

school district can now earn an entire associate degree while in high school. As a result of these efforts, the college’s student body now reflects the region’s demographic diversity, with a less

than one percentage point difference between the region and the college for Native American, Black, Hispanic, and Asian populations.

South Puget Sound’s faculty, staff, and leaders are aligned on continuing to improve student outcomes. According to Board Chair Garman, “Our core themes are student achievement and equity. Our mission is to ... [support] the whole student, providing wraparound services, and then removing barriers to close the equity gaps.” At South Puget Sound, the groundwork has been laid for further strengthening a data-informed culture of continuous improvement and equitable outcomes.



Southwest Wisconsin Technical College



HIGHLIGHTS

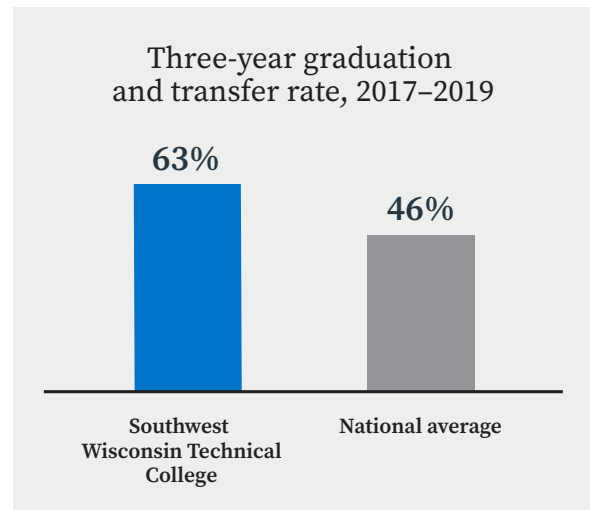
- **Located in the small town of Fennimore in rural Wisconsin**
- **3,600 students**
- **Most workforce-oriented among this year's finalists**
- **63% three-year graduation and transfer rate**
- ★ **\$1,000 reduction in average student debt load in recent years**

Like many other small rural U.S. community colleges, Southwest Wisconsin Technical College specializes in technical programs designed to develop regional workforce talent. But Southwest Wisconsin Tech stands out with a completion rate 17 percentage points above the national average and exceptional labor market outcomes for graduates. Beyond those data points, what's most impressive at the college is a deep, shared commitment to robust and regular assessment of classroom teaching and program performance that benefits students, local employers, and the region as a whole.

Four out of five credentials earned at Southwest Wisconsin Tech are in vocational and technical fields, and those credentials have tremendous value. Five years after completion, students who attain an associate degree or one-year certificate have earnings that far exceed the average for new hires in the region. One reason for these strong results: The college ensures the relevancy of what it offers through an annual analysis of employer need and labor market data, which helps leaders decide what new programs to add, which existing programs to

expand, and which to close because of low wages or lack of available jobs.

Relationships with employers are strong, in part because their feedback is solicited frequently and taken seriously as part of a process for evaluating and improving programs of study. Annually, every program undergoes an instructional vitality assessment that includes analysis of learning outcomes, course completion rates, and enrollment and retention rates. This review leads to substantial changes in programs. For example, the college relocated the computer numerical control and



lab technician programs, resulting in better student outcomes. This process also helps the college partner with employers to ensure students are learning needed skills. Today, three-quarters of the college's programs offer students credit for work-based learning, including in internships, practicums, and clinical work.

Southwest Wisconsin Tech stands out as a leader in strengthening classroom education as well. Many colleges work with faculty to use student learning outcome assessments to improve teaching practices; very few succeed at the scale that Southwest Wisconsin Tech has. Assessment is embedded as part of the rhythm and culture of the college. Every semester, faculty members identify where students are failing to meet learning outcomes and course-level goals, make plans to improve, and then follow through to assess the effectiveness of those plans in the next semester. What is most remarkable about this is that just seven years ago an accreditor cited learning outcomes assessment as an enormous weakness at the college—President Jason Wood was able to turn that criticism into fuel for fast progress and continued dedication.

Faculty engagement in this approach to learning improvement is genuine, deep, and ubiquitous. Ed Anderson, a welding instructor, is proud of his program's participation. "Everybody here is on board. It's not just the welding instructors; it's not just faculty; it's faculty and staff. Twice a

year, we have an Instructional Vitality Day, which is our time to talk about our assessments and coach new employees."

Many colleges work with faculty to use student learning outcome assessments to improve teaching practices; very few succeed at the scale that Southwest Wisconsin Tech has.

Anderson became a member of the assessment workgroup for welding because, as he explained, "I didn't know if I was doing it right. We look at grades across all the cohorts and find out where we're having trouble. Then we meet and discuss how we're going to fix it, how

we're going to make it better. We come up with a plan and document it ... We're putting a lot of time and work into it, but when you start finding out what's working, and then spread it, you can see students' grades go up."

Southwest Wisconsin Tech's "all-hands-on-deck" effort to continuously improve what is at the heart of community college education—programs of study and the courses within them—offers lessons for rural, suburban, and urban community colleges nationwide. It also serves as a strong foundation on which Southwest Wisconsin Tech can further advance student success and equity in the years ahead.



How are the winners selected?

To award the Aspen Prize, the College Excellence Program engages in a rigorous two-year process that assesses student outcomes at over 1,000 U.S. community colleges, leading to the selection of 25 semifinalists, 10 finalists, and, ultimately, the winners.

Throughout the process, Aspen and the higher education experts they engage analyze quantitative data, evaluate detailed applications from colleges, and interview a wide range of stakeholders at colleges.

Round 1: From 1,000 to 150 institutions eligible to apply

A national panel of community college experts devises a model based on publicly available data to identify 150 colleges eligible to apply. The model considers overall student outcomes, the degree of equity in the outcomes for low-income students and students of color, and improvement over time.

Round 2: From 150 eligible institutions to 25 semifinalists and 10 finalists

Aspen invites eligible colleges to submit an application detailing their approach to student success. A committee of experts scores applications and additional student outcomes data, then a panel of Aspen and external experts interviews leaders at the top 40 colleges to gather further evidence. This informs the selection of the 25 semifinalist institutions (a recognition added for the first time in this cycle). The selection committee then convenes for a day-long meeting to name the 10 finalist institutions.

Round 3: From 10 finalists to winners

With a small team of experts in community college practice, research, and leadership, Aspen conducts two-day site visits to each finalist institution. Partnering with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), Aspen also collects additional information on employment and earnings outcomes. A jury of prominent leaders in education, business, politics, policy, journalism, and other relevant fields reviews quantitative and qualitative analyses of each institution to select the winners.

How are the finalists assessed?

To assess the finalist colleges, the Aspen Institute collects quantitative and qualitative data as well as extensive contextual data (sources listed below). All of this information helps the finalist selection committee and Aspen Prize jury understand each finalist college and the unique attributes of the communities and regions they serve.

The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

- Credentials awarded per 100 FTE (including both full- and part-time students)
 - For all students
 - For students of color (Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous students)
- Three-year graduation/transfer rate
 - For all students
 - For students of color (Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous students)
- Three-year graduation rate for Pell grant recipients
- Retention rate (first to second year)
- Eight-year completion outcomes for full- and part-time students
- Improvement over five years on five measures: retention rate, three-year graduation/transfer rate, credentials awarded per 100 FTE, and eight-year completion outcomes for full- and part-time students
- Percentage of students attending part-time
- Percentage of vocational/technical awards (out of all awards conferred)
- Percentage of non-traditional age students (25 and older)
- Percentage of Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous students
- Percentage of Pell grant recipients

National Student Clearinghouse

- Four-year transfer rate
- Bachelor's degree completion rate
- First-year retention and persistence rate

Institutional Data

- Workforce outcomes based on surveys
- Completion of math and English gateway courses in students' first year
- Credit accumulation rate in first year

State Unemployment Insurance Records Matched with Institutional Cohort Data

- Classes of 2015 and 2019 employment information
 - Employment rate one year and five years after graduation
 - Annualized salaries and wages five years after graduation

U.S. Census

- Median family income of service area
- Urbanicity of institution location
- Racial/ethnic demographics of the service area
- Average annual county new hire wage
- Percentage of service area population living below 200% of poverty line

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

- County unemployment rate
- County five-year employment change rate
- Average annual county wage and average wages for new hires

Site Visits

- Expert site visitors generate reports based on interviews with institutional leaders, professors, department chairs, deans, staff, students, board members, community partners, and employers as well as documents submitted by each institution, including strategic plans, accreditation reports, and program review reports

2023 Aspen Prize Decision-Making Committees

We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to the analytic work and selection processes that led to the selection of the 2023 Aspen Prize winners.

Data and Metrics Advisory Panel

The Data and Metrics Advisory Panel, with technical support from NCHEMS, provided critical guidance to improve upon the methodology for evaluating all U.S. community colleges and select colleges eligible to apply for the Aspen Prize.

- Kathy Booth**, Project Director, Educational Data and Policy, WestEd
- Sue Clery**, Founding Partner, ASA Research
- Darla Cooper**, Executive Director, Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges
- Kim Dancy**, Associate Director of Research & Policy, Institute for Higher Education Policy
- Afet Dundar**, Senior Research Director, Institute for Women's Policy Research
- John Fink**, Senior Research Associate and Program Lead, Community College Research Center
- Laurie Heacock**, Data Coach, Achieving the Dream
- Kent Phillippe**, Vice President, Research & Student Success, American Association of Community Colleges
- Francisco Solis**, Interim Vice President for Academic Success, San Antonio College
- Christina Whitfield**, Senior Vice President and Chief of Staff, State Higher Education Executive Officers Association

Finalist Selection Committee

The Finalist Selection Committee reviewed data, applications, and findings from leadership interviews to identify 10 institutions that deliver exceptional student results.

- Sue Clery**, Founding Partner, ASA Research
- Kimberly Green**, Executive Director, Advance CTE
- Marc Herzog**, Chancellor Emeritus, Connecticut Community College System
- Audrey Jaeger**, Executive Director, NC State's Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research
- Robert Johnstone**, Founder and President, National Center for Inquiry and Improvement
- Hana Lahr**, Senior Research Associate, Community College Research Center
- Amy Laitinen**, Senior Director of Higher Education, New America
- Shannon Looney**, Principal and Senior Consultant, SML Consulting
- Susan Mayer**, Chief Learning Officer, Achieving the Dream
- Diego Navarro**, Founder, Academy for College Excellence
- John Nixon**, President Emeritus, Mt. San Antonio College
- Amelia Parnell**, Vice President for Research and Policy, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators
- Gretchen Schmidt**, Senior Fellow, National Center for Inquiry and Improvement
- Michele Siqueiros**, President, Campaign for College Opportunity
- Nicole Smith**, Chief Economist, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce
- Heather Wathington**, CEO, iMentor

Site Visitors

Teams of experienced researchers and practitioners conducted two-day site visits to each of the 10 finalist institutions to gather qualitative research.

Pascale Charlot, Managing Director, Aspen Institute College Excellence Program

Darla Cooper, Executive Director, Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges

Martha Ellis, Interim President and CEO, Texas Association of Community Colleges

Maria Harper-Marinick, Senior Fellow, Aspen Institute College Excellence Program;
Chancellor Emeritus, Maricopa Community College District

Robert Johnstone, Founder and President, National Center for Inquiry and Improvement

Hana Lahr, Senior Research Associate, Community College Research Center

Mary Rittling, Senior Fellow, Aspen Institute College Excellence Program;
President Emeritus, Davidson Community College

Lenore Rodicio, Senior Fellow, Aspen Institute College Excellence Program;
former Executive Vice President and Provost, Miami Dade College

Gretchen Schmidt, Senior Fellow, National Center for Inquiry and Improvement

Josh Wyner, Executive Director, Aspen Institute College Excellence Program

Jury

The Prize Jury thoughtfully reviewed quantitative data and site visit reports and deliberated to select the 10 finalists.

Jaime Aquino, Superintendent, San Antonio Independent School District

Thomas Brock, Director, Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University

Sarita Brown, President, Excelencia in Education

Andrew Kelly, Senior Vice President for Strategy and Policy, University of North Carolina System

David Leonhardt, Senior Writer, The New York Times

Ericka Miller, President and CEO, Isaacson, Miller

Joelle Phillips, President, AT&T Tennessee

Michael Sorrell, President, Paul Quinn College

Jane Swift, President and Executive Director, LearnLaunch; former Governor of Massachusetts

We are grateful to the College Excellence Program team who contributed extensively throughout the Aspen Prize administration, documentation, and analysis, and to Richard Kazis, who contributed to this publication.

COLLEGE EXCELLENCE PROGRAM

 aspen institute

The Aspen Institute gratefully acknowledges the following charitable institutions' leadership and support for the 2023 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence:

Ascendium[®]
Elevating opportunity

JPMORGAN CHASE & CO.

**TheJoyce
Foundation**

THE KRESGE FOUNDATION