

AI and Trusteeship

Dual Enrollment

CEO Benefits

WINTER 2026

Trustee

QUARTERLY

'The Perfect Job'

ACCT Chair Carol Del Carlo believes trustees must focus on wellbeing — for themselves, their colleges, and their CEOs.

2026 AWARDS

REGIONAL AWARDS

**Trustee Leadership
Impact and Success
Chief Executive Officer
Faculty Member
Professional Board Staff Member**

ASSOCIATION AWARDS

**M. Dale Ensign Trustee Leadership
Impact and Success
Marie Y. Martin CEO
William H. Meardy Faculty Member
Professional Board Staff Member**

ACCT's awards program is designed to recognize and honor outstanding community college trustees, student success programs, presidents, faculty members, and professional board staff members at regional and national levels. In order to be considered for an Association Award, you must first submit a nomination at the regional level.

The Awards committees will select and notify the Awards recipients prior to the ACCT Leadership Congress. ACCT's Awards recipients will be honored at the 2026 ACCT Leadership Congress this October in Chicago, Illinois.

Visit www.acct.org for specific nomination criteria and to submit nominations online.

Call 202.499.5309 with any questions.
All nominations must be received by June 22, 2026.

**NOMINATIONS DUE
JUNE 22 2026**





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In Pursuit of a Common Good

GREETINGS! AS CHAIR OF THE Association of Community College Trustees, I am honored to share a few thoughts with you during what is an historic — and challenging — time in higher education.

I am extremely confident that we will meet these challenges as we play to our greatest strengths — that community colleges are community first, and that they are community centered. It is this spirit that adds meaning to our work and ensures that our greatest impact is felt by the people we are tasked to serve — the students, faculty, and staff of our community colleges.

It is important that as we do this work, we constantly remind ourselves of the meaning of what we do. As trustees, we are the people who set the highest standards of governance, collaboration, innovation, and perhaps most importantly of all, of grace, kindness, and understanding.

Let me explain. It is always in our best interest to express care and concern for one another. When we take that extra moment to listen attentively to what our colleagues have to say, when we simply say to someone during a meeting or in a hallway or in a campus's administrative offices or classrooms, "How are you? I mean, how, really, are you doing?" we are furthering the human scope of what we do. I know we can all relate to minutes like these, where we've often wondered what a next, important step might be. And then there is someone who speaks up and declares, sometimes with bravado and sometimes with humility, but always with feeling: "What can I do to

help?" When we invite others in, that shared experience makes us all infinitely stronger.

As I mentioned at the beginning, this is an extremely challenging moment for institutions of higher education across the country. As chair, I wish to place an important emphasis on the health and wellbeing, both physical and mental, of all of our people, and in particular our presidents and chancellors who give so much of themselves to meet the incredible demands of our institutions. These are our happy warriors. We are all friends and colleagues in pursuit of a common good, sharing our commitment to further the transformational impact of our community colleges. Let's all look out for one another as we do this important work.

Carol Del Carlo

Nevada System of Higher Education, NV

Trustee

QUARTERLY

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Exploring college grounds and speaking with college leaders, staff, and students alike is a particular pleasure and privilege of my role. It's also an essential one, not only because I enjoy it so much, but also because it's a primary way to understand what ACCT's members need.

What Have We Done for You Lately?

DEAR ACCT MEMBERS,

SINCE I ASSUMED THE PRESIDENCY AT ACCT, I have spent a significant amount of time in the air and on the road visiting as many college campuses as I can. Exploring college grounds and speaking with college leaders, staff, and students alike is a particular pleasure and privilege of my role. It's also an essential one, not only because I enjoy it so much, but also because it's a primary way to understand what ACCT's members need.

Through this magazine, through events, and at every opportunity, the ACCT staff and board love to share what the association is busy doing on behalf of our members. The truth is that almost all of our time is spent doing what we know our members need and want from us and trying to anticipate what will be needed and useful in the near and long-term future. Whether that influences our legislative priorities or our governance education offerings, it really is all for you.

I'm sure that you receive the same survey requests I do every time you go anywhere or buy anything, and I am mindful of not overwhelming our membership with requests for input — but we truly value it! It determines how we serve you, and my number one priority is making you secure in your governance and leadership positions.

So with that said, I want to very *sincerely* invite you to reach out to me and to our staff leadership with anything that's on your mind. Send an email to acctinfo@acct.org to reach anyone on staff or reach out directly to:

- Julie Golder, Vice President for Search Services, at jgolder@acct.org
- Robin Matross Helms, Vice President for Membership & Educational Services, at rhelms@acct.org
- Carrie Warick-Smith, Vice President for Public Policy, at cwsmith@acct.org
- Karen Lomax, Executive Coordinator to the President and Board of Directors, at klomax@acct.org.

I look forward to seeing you in person this year, and I hope to hear from you soon.

JEE HANG LEE

ACCT President and CEO

NEWS & NOTES

ACCT Association Awards Winners

ACCT announced the recipients of its annual Association Awards for community college trustees, equity programs, chief executive officers, faculty members, and professional board staff members during the ACCT Awards Gala at the 2025 ACCT Leadership Congress convened in October in New Orleans, Louisiana. Awardees were announced live during the gala on ACCT's Twitter (@CCTrustees). For photos and videos of the Association and Regional Awards, visit www.acct.org/awards.



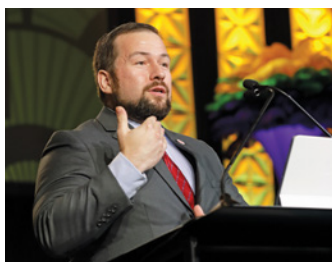
2025 M. Dale Ensign Trustee Leadership Award
Ken Hector
Chemeketa Community College, Oregon



2025 Marie Y. Martin Chief Executive Award
Amy Morrison
Lake Washington Institute of Technology, Washington



2025 Impact and Success Award
Hudson County Community College, New Jersey



2025 William H. Meardy Faculty Member Award
Brandon Keller
Northeast Community College, Nebraska



2025 ACCT Professional Board Staff Member Award
Benita Duncan
Lansing Community College, Michigan



For more information about the ACCT Awards program, contact awards@acct.org.

Model Standards of Good Practice for Trustee Boards

In Support of Effective Community College Governance, the Board Believes:

- That it derives its authority from the community and that it must always act as an advocate on behalf of the entire community;
- That it must clearly define and articulate its role;
- That it is responsible for creating and maintaining a spirit of true cooperation and a mutually supportive relationship with its CEO;
- That it always strives to differentiate between external and internal processes in the exercise of its authority;
- That its trustee members should engage in a regular and ongoing process of in-service training and continuous improvement;
- That its trustee members come to each meeting prepared and ready to debate issues fully and openly;
- That it endeavors to remain always accountable to the community;
- That it honestly debates the issues affecting its community and speaks with one voice once a decision or policy is made.

**The term "board" refers to a community college board of trustees or appropriate governing authority.*

LET THE LAW WORK FOR YOU

Timing is everything when it comes to advocacy, but not everyone has time to pay attention to pending legislation day in and day out.

ACCT's Latest Action in Washington (LAW) Updates do the work for you.

LAW Updates are brief summaries of legislative actions emailed to subscribers as legislation happens, giving community college trustees, presidents, and other leaders and advocates time to contact their representatives and exert influence before it's too late.

Please encourage your fellow trustees, presidents, and colleagues to stay up to date about legislation that affects their community colleges by signing up for LAW newsletters. To join, simply email publicpolicy@acct.org with "LAW Alert" in the subject of the email.

For more information about ACCT's advocacy services, visit www.acct.org/advocacy.

2025 M. Dale Ensign Trustee Leadership Award Winner



**Ken Hector, Chemeketa
Community College, Oregon**

**What does this award mean
to you?**

It means the world to me, and it is unbelievably humbling. To be recognized for something you are passionate about is special, particularly when it comes from your peers.

**What advice would you give to other community college
trustees in leadership?**

While leadership is the ability to guide or influence an individual or group (team) toward realization of a common vision or goal, effective leaders use motivation, inspiration and collaboration, not authority, to achieve the vision or goal.

YOU could be the next M. Dale Ensign Trustee Leadership Award winner! Visit ACCT.org/awards to learn more about the 2026 awards program or to nominate outstanding board members.



Learn more about the 2026 awards program
at ACCT.org/awards.

Transatlantic Exchange Expands as U.S. and U.K. Students Drive Sustainability and Workforce Innovation

LAUNCHED IN OCTOBER 2024 BY the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) and the U.K.'s Association of Colleges (AoC), with support from the Cyril Taylor Charitable Foundation, the U.S.-UK Community College and Technical Education Exchange is already producing results, reshaping how students and faculty collaborate across borders.

First Cohort in Action

Southport College (England) & Bergen Community College (New Jersey): Southport students traveled to Bergen this fall to work alongside American peers on a project to transform the City of Hackensack's Main Street into a prototype for sustainable urban design. Their plans include an electrical microgrid powered by photovoltaic panels, kinetic paving, and SMART technologies. Bergen students are leading the engineering component, while Southport students are developing sustainable building designs. The final blueprints and 3D models will be presented to Hackensack town representatives, with the potential to be implemented in the coming years.

Cambridge Regional College (England) & Linn Benton Community College (Oregon): Cambridge students visited LBCC's Advanced Transportation Technology Center, touring EV repair facilities and lab spaces, meeting with Oregon state officials, and gaining insights on the latest technology developments from visits to LBCC's industry partners. The collaboration will continue in February, when LBCC faculty and students will travel to Cambridge for hands-on training and industry site visits.

Both partnerships highlight the exchange program's focus on green skills and advanced workforce pathways, aligning

education with pressing global challenges. **Harvey Gilchrist**, a student at Southport College who participated in the visit to Bergen Community College, reflected on the experience during an In the Know with ACCT podcast, saying, "this project has truly been the experience of a lifetime. Meeting new people and discussing different approaches to sustainability gave me a clearer sense of direction and purpose. It wouldn't have been the same without this exchange." The podcast episode, which features exchange program students, can be heard by searching the Apple, Google Play, or Spotify apps for "In the Know with ACCT."

Looking Ahead

Students from Bergen and Linn Benton will travel to their U.K. partner colleges in spring 2026, continuing the reciprocal exchange model. Organizers say these experiences not only expand technical knowledge but also provide students with the communication and intercultural skills needed to succeed in an interconnected global workforce. "The immediate benefits of our pilot program to participating students and colleges demonstrate that targeted, workforce-based exchange partnerships are well positioned for success," said ACCT Vice President for Membership and Educational Services **Robin Matross Helms**. "We are excited to build on this clear validation of our approach."

Second Cohort Announced

Building on early success, ACCT and AoC have launched a second cohort of partnerships:

- Dallas College (Texas) paired with Inspire Education Group (U.K.), with a focus on sustainable energy.

- Hudson County Community College (New Jersey) paired with Capital City College Group (U.K.), with a focus on culinary arts and hospitality.

Leaders of the new partnerships expressed enthusiasm about joining the initiative. "We are thrilled to join this transatlantic exchange," said **Shawnda Navarro Floyd**, provost and vice chancellor for workforce education at Dallas College. "Our students will gain invaluable technical experience in a critical field for our state and local economy." Hudson County Community College President **Chris Reber** added, "We are thrilled to partner with Capital City College Group to expand workforce pathways with our Culinary Arts Institute. Through this international exchange of knowledge and expertise, we look forward to building transformational experiences for our Hudson students."

A Growing Vision

The Cyril Taylor Charitable Foundation, whose support has been critical to the program's launch and expansion, emphasized its long-term vision and impact: "We are proud to support these exchanges, which empower students to tackle global challenges and build a brighter future — for themselves, their communities, and the world," said **William L. Gertz**, trustee of the Cyril Taylor Charitable Foundation. ACCT Vice President Robin Matross Helms underscored the program's broader mission, saying "Community colleges and technical education have a critical role to play in preparing students to succeed in a global workforce, and in tackling the grand global challenges of our time. This exchange is laying the foundation for many more workforce-focused global partnerships down the road."

Looking For A New President, Vice President, Provost, or Vice Chancellor?

Our Success

With over 40 years of experience as the only national non-profit organization dedicated to providing services to community college and Governing Boards, ACCT Searches delivers trusted and nationally acclaimed services in all phases of community college executive searches. We have successfully completed over 500 CEO Searches ranging from campus presidents to state system presidents. Focusing on two-year public community and technical colleges, we are uniquely qualified to provide comprehensive search assistance, recruitment of a diverse and high-quality pool of candidates, and guidance on a sound process to the board and the college.



Our Strengths

- We understand the needs of community colleges.
- We find and cultivate high-caliber talent.
- We build a unique pool of candidates for each search to “fit” the college.
- We have extensive contacts with highly accomplished candidates poised to advance.
- We have the advantage of the ACCT membership as a source of contacts.

ACCT Searches will hold your hand during every step of the selection process.

For more information on ACCT’s expanded services to assist with the placement of new executive leaders at your community colleges, contact acctsearches@acct.org.

New ACCT, CSCC Report Reveals Who Community College Trustees Are and Why They Serve

‘Community College Trusteeship in 2025’ is the largest survey of its kind, revealing important insights into who governs two-year institutions.

ACCT, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY of Community Colleges (CSCC), recently released *Community College Trusteeship in 2025: A Commitment to Serve*. This report is the most comprehensive analysis to date of community college trustees: who they are, why they serve, and what they perceive to be the most critical priorities and challenges for their institutions and the sector.

“Community college trustees are publicly elected and appointed officials who volunteer their time to serve higher education institutions within their communities,” said ACCT President and CEO **Jee Hang Lee**. “This new study demonstrates that trustees have a pulse on their communities’ needs, a deep commitment to the community college mission of open access to high-quality higher education for all people, and the kind of visionary thinking needed to keep their institutions thriving.”

“We are excited by the insights revealed in *Community College Trusteeship in 2025*,” said ACCT Vice President for Membership and Educational Services **Dr. Robin Matross Helms**. “The findings will inform scholarship on community college governance and influence development of ACCT’s educational programs and services.”

“Connecting CSCC’s research capacity with ACCT’s deep understanding of its membership and global network is the kind of partnership needed for this level of scholarship. For the first time, we have data on trustees that can be generalized across the country and analyzed within specific states or regions, ultimately improving our understanding of and ability to support these vital community members,” said CSCC Managing Director **Dr. Carrie B. Kisker**.

Building on previous surveys conducted in 1997 and 2018 and integrating qualitative interviews, findings from this study provide information about who trustees are and why they serve, highlight the beliefs and values that influence community college trustees’ decision making, and shed light on professional development opportunities that can assist trustees in supporting their colleges through innovative and transformational changes.

Key findings include:

- 64% of trustees attended a community college, and nearly two in five are first-generation college students.
- 86% hold a bachelor’s degree or higher, with 59% earning a master’s, professional, or doctoral degree.
- Trustees come from diverse professional backgrounds, with

the most common fields being education, business, healthcare, government, and legal professions.

- Trustees report strong relationships with their college CEOs, with 94% indicating a high level of trust.

The survey includes illuminating quotes from in-depth qualitative interviews conducted by coauthors

Dr. Susan Kater and **Dr. Regina Garza Mitchell:**

“I think it’s just serving an organization with a mission that positively transforms lives. We are transformative and impactful. And we see it every day.”

“We’re all focusing on [the] challenge of the enrollment cliff.... I think we are up from last year in our enrollment numbers, but we can’t lose sight of how we attract and retain and move these folks on to jobs.”

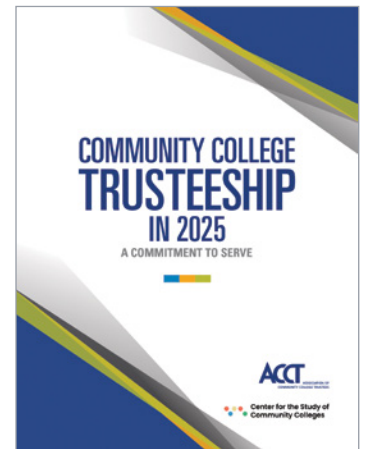
“Working in community colleges is a passion of mine because I’m a first-generation college graduate...I grew up on a community college campus. My mother was an adult learner...My brother and I would have to go to night classes with her because we didn’t have childcare.”

When asked what their college needs to be doing now to prepare for the future the most common theme was the need to equip students for rapidly changing workforce demands. “The change in the workforce, that’s huge... we need to meet the needs of both the small communities and the larger ones we serve.”

Board members appreciate their colleges and their ability to serve them.

“This landmark study demonstrates the vital role trustees play in shaping the future of community colleges,” said ACCT Associate Vice President for Strategic Communications **David Conner**. “It shows that board members are engaged, invested, and dedicated to their fiduciary responsibilities and student success.”

The full report is available for download at www.acct.org.





Following our Path: The ACCT Dou (道)

BY ROBIN MATROSS HELMS

JANUARY ALWAYS MAKES ME THINK OF JAPAN. AS 1999 DAWNED, I was packing my bags for Kyoto, Japan, where I spent the subsequent six months as a study abroad program director, helping shape the experience of an intrepid group of American students seeking to immerse themselves in a new language, culture, and educational setting.

As is so often the case, as a teacher I was learning right alongside my students. Having majored in East Asian Studies in college, I had a solid base knowledge of Japanese history and cultural concepts. But it was during my time in Kyoto that I came to understand the lived reality of what I had read about, and how longstanding foundational frameworks and knowledge continue to infuse daily life, practices, and approaches.



The idea of *dou*, often translated as “way” or “path,” is one of these core concepts that has stuck with me throughout my life and career. An often-cited example from Japan is *bushidou*, or “way of the samurai,” encapsulated in a code of conduct and set of guiding principles. *Dou*, however, is broader — if I were doing the translating, I would emphasize *dou* almost as a way of being, a mindset and feeling that underpins and drives all action.

As my team and our colleagues across the association have reflected on our work of the last year and what we are most proud of in how we’ve served our colleges and students, some distinct throughlines emerged in terms of our approaches and mindset. Whether in executive searches, trustee education, governance services, Center for Policy and Practice projects, or global education, it’s clear that there is a distinct “ACCT *dou*” guiding our work:

Members first. As an association in Washington, it’s important that we have a seat at the table for key policy discussions and that we serve as thought leaders by producing research and weighing in on big-picture issues that impact our sector. In allocating our staff’s time and efforts, however, the fundamental decision factor at ACCT is “how can we bring more value to our members?” A great example comes from our public policy team’s customized, interactive presentations for individual boards to work through the impacts of federal policy changes on their own campuses. Broad, theoretical discussion of policy impacts is certainly valuable, but is also relatively accessible in the news. As we’ve heard from our members, our team taking this analysis to the campus level is an extra step that has brought clarity and helped inform action.

High-touch, hands-on. At the start of new projects with higher education

institutions over the years, I’ve almost always heard something along the lines of, “Yeah, our college is really weird in that we...” Often whatever follows that phrase genuinely is unique, and perhaps a little weird — or at least quirky. But *every* college has characteristics and quirks that underpin how it works, how best to get things done, and how to serve its students. That’s culture. Culture is a collection of quirks. As part of the ACCT *dou*, we are committed to working closely with our members to understand those quirks and co-develop solutions that align with them. Our searches and governance services teams, with support from our amazing consultants, spend time getting to know the colleges they work with, co-develop processes and content, communicate continually, and troubleshoot in real-time as needed. In our cohort-based programs such as Kids on Campus and our global Partnership Labs, we go deep in the weeds on implementation of projects and provide hands-on support throughout.

Multimodal. Since taking the helm at ACCT four years ago, Jee Hang Lee has been committed to meeting our members where they are. We have operationalized this through our state-based Governance Leadership Institutes to bring live programs closer to our members, and through the ACCT Connect platform to provide trustee education to members anytime and anywhere. We have also added to our services offerings with policy reviews and CEO compensation benchmarking. Our goal is to engage with our members in a multitude of formats, providing a consistent baseline of support (e.g., trustee governance training pathways through the Excel badging program and ACCT Connect) and partnering to address specific in-the-moment needs (e.g., executive searches).

Wellness-wise. Our board chair Carol del Carlo eloquently articulates the importance

of wellness in this issue’s letter (see p. 1), urging all of us to approach our work from a human-first perspective, and from a starting point of compassion and caring. This aligns beautifully with our member-first, hands-on, multimodal approach that promotes wellness of our boards, students, colleges, workforce, communities, and the world as a component of the ACCT *dou*. With Carol’s leadership, you’ll see more from us on this theme throughout the coming year.

In articulating the characteristics of the ACCT *dou*, I’m struck by the parallels between our “way” and that of community colleges and our sector as a whole. Your students — like our members are for us — are at the heart of everything you do. You take a high-touch, hands-on approach to supporting them and their success, and prioritize their wellness in the broadest sense. The community college *dou* and the ACCT *dou* are not new — they are simply how we work, and who we are. At ACCT, we are excited to continue to walk our paths with you together in this important work — into 2026 and beyond.



Robin Matross Helms, Ph.D., is ACCT’s vice president for membership and educational services. She can be reached at rhelms@acct.org.



After a Historic Year, Three Questions Loom Large

Workforce Pell, ‘Do No Harm’ measures, and student loan changes could impact enrollment at community colleges.

BY CARRIE WARICK-SMITH

AS I CONTEMPLATED THE TOPIC FOR THIS FIRST COLUMN of 2026, I realized that the word count of this magazine department can’t accommodate everything that happened in higher education last year. To say, “just a few things happened,” tongue firmly in cheek, does not begin to capture a year that saw more significant policy shifts than during every year of the previous decade combined.

There were some significant highs: Workforce Pell finally became law, and community colleges led growth in all three enrollment reports from the National Student Clearinghouse. And there were big changes, particularly the generational shift in student loan structure along with a new “Do No Harm” accountability measure for degree programs to be loan eligible. Colleges also faced significant uncertainty as the U.S. Department of Education set its funding priorities, revoked funds for projects mentioning diversity, equity, and inclusion, and signed interagency agreements transferring education functions to other agencies.

What I have found myself pondering is how these seismic changes could affect enrollment, so here I will consider three shifts most likely to impact community colleges.

Will launching Workforce Pell increase enrollment at community colleges?

Allowing students to use Pell dollars for workforce programs is beneficial, as more students can access those programs and become lifelong learners who continue to progress through their careers. While increases in enrollment numbers will begin in 2026, larger expansion will take more time.

With the program beginning July 1, and only six months to work through regulatory processes at the federal and state levels leading to that date, colleges may onboard a smaller number of programs in 2026 and expand offerings in 2027. The July 1 date is the starting line, not the deadline, for program participation.

Enrollment momentum is likely to continue, and Workforce Pell positions community colleges to expand their role as accessible pathways to economic mobility.

Colleges must also communicate the availability of the new aid to potential students — not just to interested students who arrive on campus asking what their options are, but also via outreach to individuals who may not be considering any postsecondary education or training because they assume it's too costly and time consuming.

Will accountability impact enrollment trends?

In 2025, when President Trump signed H.R. 1 into law, he didn't only create the Workforce Pell program, but also the first-ever accountability program tying outcomes to federal student aid eligibility. Referred to as the “Do No Harm” approach, the new measure requires the majority of degree recipients from a program to earn more than high school graduates without any college education. An analysis by Michael Itzkowitz of The HEA Group, published on its blog at theheagroup.com on January 5, finds that only 2% of associate and bachelor's degree programs would fail this test. However, 29% of undergraduate certificate programs overseen by the related Gainful Employment test do not meet the mark.

For associate programs, this new accountability measure should not significantly impact enrollment. With only 2% of programs possibly failing, and only 11% of community college students borrowing with federal loans, the number of students who land in the middle of the Venn diagram of borrowing for failing programs will be minute.

On the certificate programs side, the impact could be larger. The field has been facing implementation of gainful employment measures since the Obama Administration first introduced the idea. However, each administration has changed the rule since its creation. Until the final regulation is released, we won't know how this administration will approach gainful employment for certificate programs. If it keeps this earnings metric, and ties it to both loans and Pell eligibility, the impact on enrollment could be larger.

Will student loan changes impact enrollment trends?

The final section of H.R. 1 that could impact enrollment involves shifts in the structure of student loans. There are new limits on undergraduate borrowing, particularly through the Parent PLUS loan program. This has led many colleges to ask whether they may see a bump in enrollment as students seek more affordable options. While these

perceptions may drive some students, I spoke with Preston Cooper of the American Enterprise Institute to get a better idea of what percentage of undergraduate students have parents who borrow over the new cap. His short answer: “My instinct is that any enrollment impacts on community colleges would be minor.”

Cooper broke down the numbers as follows: Only 10% of dependent undergraduates have parents using PLUS loans, and of those, only one-third currently borrow above the new \$20,000 limit in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. So only 3% of students will plausibly be impacted, and those are mostly at private nonprofit schools. Given that they primarily attend private nonprofits, these students could receive more aid, or their families may consider private loans.

Cooper concluded that “the numbers of students we're talking about here just aren't enough for there to be a meaningful increase in enrollment in the community college sector broadly, though it's possible the story could be different for some individual schools.”

Closing Thoughts

As community colleges navigate 2026, the sector finds itself in a unique position of opportunity. Enrollment momentum is likely to continue, and Workforce Pell positions community colleges to expand their role as accessible pathways to economic mobility.

Community colleges have always been an important element of America's workforce development strategy. Not only is that valuable role increasing, but it's also becoming generally recognized. As community college leaders meet with their elected officials during the National Legislative Summit this year, it's time to seize the moment and ensure Congress continues the federal investment in our colleges so they can continue to support both individual students and their regions.



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Power the Next Generation of Student Success with

SNAP E&T

Community colleges hold the key to transforming untapped federal dollars into the lifeline their most vulnerable students need — while cutting the cost of that support in half.

By Donald Dement

ACROSS THE NATION, COMMUNITY COLLEGES SIT at the intersection of education and economic transformation. They are engines of upward mobility — often the only open door for adults seeking to build sustainable living-wage careers. Yet, in serving students who shoulder the heaviest burdens of poverty, food insecurity, and family responsibility, community colleges face a constant challenge: how to fund the holistic support these students need to stay enrolled, persist, and ultimately succeed.

Enter the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T).

For many, it's an unfamiliar acronym. For others, it's a bureaucratic tangle. But at its core, SNAP E&T represents something far simpler — and more powerful. It is a federal reimbursement mechanism designed to help states and their partners (including community colleges) fund workforce and student support programs

for SNAP recipients. And yet, despite its transformative potential, billions of available dollars go unused every year.

The Untapped Resource Hidden in Plain Sight

It's a quiet irony: community colleges — institutions built to expand opportunity — are often unaware of one of the most accessible federal tools available to them. The SNAP E&T 50-50 reimbursement model allows colleges to recoup half of their non-federal spending on eligible education and training services.

That means if a college invests non-federal funds in student support, case management, or workforce readiness activities for students receiving SNAP benefits, the federal government reimburses 50 percent of those costs using 50-50 Funds.

These are not competitive grants. There are no application deadlines that expire or waiting lists that drag on. These funds are available through ongoing partnerships with state agencies, sitting

quietly on the table, waiting to be claimed. And yet many colleges either don't know they exist or feel overwhelmed by the idea of implementation, a kind of "opportunity fatigue" that leaves money unspent and students underserved.

Reframing SNAP E&T: From Bureaucracy to Strategy

SNAP E&T is not just a social safety net; it's a strategic reinvestment vehicle for colleges committed to equity and workforce transformation. By aligning their existing student support infrastructure with E&T-eligible activities, colleges can leverage a reliable funding stream to strengthen what they already do best: providing training and opportunities for economic mobility.

Imagine cutting the operational cost of holistic case management in half, not by scaling back services, but by using existing dollars more intentionally.

At a time when colleges face shrinking budgets, staff burnout, and growing student need, this is not a luxury — it's a lifeline. The message to college leaders is simple but urgent: the resources to support your most at-risk students are already here. All that's missing is awareness and activation.

The Case for Case Management

Anyone working in student success knows the truth that data often obscures: academic advising alone doesn't change lives when students are hungry, homeless, or hopeless.

That's where case management steps in as a human bridge between students' lived realities and their educational goals. Effective case management in the community college context is about weekly check-ins, encouragement, and practical problem-solving. It's about letting a student know, "You're not in this alone."

For many SNAP-eligible students — often heads of households balancing school, work, and caregiving — this kind of support is not just beneficial; it's essential. When someone has their back, they stay in school. When they don't, life wins and education loses.

SNAP E&T funding allows colleges to expand this critical work sustainably. By reinvesting federal reimbursements into case management, institutions create a self-sustaining cycle of support, one where every dollar spent on helping students stabilize their lives brings another dollar back to strengthen the system.

A Mission-Driven Imperative

Community colleges have never needed to be convinced of their mission. Their campuses are proof of their commitment to economic mobility, equity, and workforce opportunity. But mission alone can't pay for the case managers, navigators, or student success teams that keep vulnerable learners enrolled.

The beauty of SNAP E&T lies in its alignment with this mission.

It empowers colleges to do *more of what they already believe in* — and to do it more sustainably. These are not new programs to build, but existing efforts that can be reframed and reinvested through partnership.

When viewed through that lens, SNAP E&T becomes less of a bureaucratic mechanism and more of a moral and fiscal responsibility. Leaving these dollars unused doesn't just cost institutions financially; it costs communities in lost opportunity, broken persistence, and unrealized potential.

Empowerment Over Dependency

This is not about dependency or welfare. It's about empowerment. SNAP E&T funds futures. It helps individuals who already demonstrate resilience and motivation by pursuing education to access the wraparound supports that make success possible.

For colleges, it's a chance to align compassion with strategy, turning moral intent into measurable impact. Every dollar drawn down helps build a bridge from poverty to potential, one student at a time.

And every community college that embraces this opportunity demonstrates what the sector has always known: education is the most effective anti-poverty program ever created.

The Call to Awareness

If there's a single takeaway, it's this: SNAP E&T is not just another federal program. It's a quiet revolution waiting for activation.

For institutions that serve students balancing survival and schooling, it offers both a moral mandate and a fiscal strategy. Implementing SNAP E&T does require effort. But it's the kind of effort that pays dividends — literally and figuratively — in the lives of students, the sustainability of programs, and the advancement of institutional mission.

In the end, this isn't about selling a service. It's about surfacing an opportunity that belongs to every community college already committed to doing more for those who have less. The funding exists. The framework exists. The students exist.

The only question is whether colleges will claim the resources that could transform the lives of those who walk through their doors each day seeking not just education, but hope.



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‘The Perfect Job’

ACCT Chair Carol Del Carlo believes trustees must focus on wellbeing — for themselves, their colleges, and their CEOs.



BY MARK TONER

CAROL DEL CARLO RECALLS BECOMING CONCERNED during a one-on-one meeting with a senior campus leader in her home state of Nevada.

“I’m pretty upfront,” says Del Carlo, a member of the Nevada Board of Regents. “I asked him, ‘are you okay? You really don’t look great.’ These are high-stress jobs, and you think about all the constituents a community college or university president is accountable to, between the faculty, staff, students, trustees, chancellors, foundation, and the public. It’s a real balancing act.”

As the 2026 ACCT Chair, Del Carlo is urging fellow trustees to focus on wellbeing — and particularly the wellbeing of their institutions’ presidents and chancellors.

“As a board member, you have an investment and a responsibility for your CEO’s wellbeing — as a human being, and as a partner to their professional wellbeing,” Del Carlo told trustees at the 2025 ACCT Leadership Congress (see p. 20). “We need to invite candid discussions to ensure their needs are being met.”

The daughter of Italian immigrants who settled Nevada’s Truckee Meadows and an original land grant family of Hispanic descent from San Diego, Del Carlo was born and raised in Reno, but she would spend much of her adult life crisscrossing the U.S. and the globe.

Her parents weren’t afforded the opportunity to attend college, but they emphasized the importance of education. During a football game her freshman year at the University of Nevada Reno (UNR), she met her future husband, George Del Carlo, a fellow Nevadan from Virginia City, the mining town that was the real-life inspiration for the classic television show *Bonanza*.

The Reno area’s first community college had yet to be built, but UNR had associate degree programs, so Del Carlo switched to one

of them to graduate in 1972 before marrying her husband, who was beginning his military career. For the next 22 years, the couple traveled to Army postings across the country and in Germany. Del Carlo continued to study at night while working full time, ultimately earning her bachelor’s degree with magna cum laude honors in 1981.

After returning to Nevada that year, the couple was planning to stay put. But Del Carlo was hired for a manager training position by General Motors, which had just moved warehousing operations to Reno, and off she would go again, moving another six times for different assignments with the automotive giant over the next two decades. Once again, she took classes at night while working, earning her master’s degree in 1987. All told, the couple moved 16 times before they returned to Nevada in 1995.

“In all this, as a military wife and moving around, I always believed in service,” Del Carlo says. “There was the need and the desire to give back.”

Del Carlo became active in state politics and non-profit organizations in retirement, but she continued to seek ways to give back. In 2016, she received a call from a friend saying, “I’ve got the perfect job for you.” That job, it turned out, would lead to three terms on the Nevada Board of Regents and ultimately the gavel as ACCT Chair.

Nevada doesn’t have individual college boards. Instead, the statewide Board of Regents has overseen Nevada’s higher education system since its founding in 1865. Today, Regents are responsible for eight institutions serving more than 100,000 students — the state’s four community colleges, two R1 research universities, and one state university, along with the Desert Research Institute (DRI), a research campus with projects on all seven continents.



But when her friend suggested she run for an open seat on the Board of Regents, Del Carlo's initial reaction was "I can't do that... I thought you had to come out of higher ed. But [my friend] said, 'Oh, no, they're looking for people with a business background and common sense, and you'd be perfect.'"

Del Carlo ended up running for a two-year term in a contested election against "a very well-funded candidate" in 2016.

"But I worked hard and won," she says, and two years later she ran unopposed. She was elected again in 2024 for her third and final term. Today, she calls serving as a Regent "the greatest gift of public service you can give in the state of Nevada."

At first, though, it was also a bit of a cultural shock. "Coming out of corporate America where everything is measured daily, I was pretty surprised we didn't have set measurements, baselines, and a continuous improvement attitude," she says. During her tenure as a Regent, the Nevada Higher Education System has added strategic goals with measurable metrics, managed budgetary challenges, created a Nevada Promise scholarship for high school students, expanded dual enrollment, added corequisites, and, most recently, implemented credit for prior learning, which Del Carlo calls "a game changer."

While the Regents oversee the full spectrum of higher education, Del Carlo emphasizes the value of the community college system. "When I ran in 2016, I felt the American public had been misled, that the four-year degree was oversold at the expense of all the wonderful things you can do at a community college," she says.

She points to prison education programs sponsored by the state's

community colleges, including an HVAC certificate program, which last year graduated 18 incarcerated women in a Las Vegas facility — one of the most in-demand jobs in the region.

"Lives are being transformed. I call it good work, worthy work, and I can't think of a better way to spend my retirement," Del Carlo says.

Del Carlo was introduced to ACCT during her first year as a Regent in 2017, when by coincidence the annual Leadership Congress was being held in Las Vegas for the first time.

"The amount of information was mind-boggling," she says. "As a new Regent, I was almost chagrined that I couldn't go to every single seminar, but I've told people over the years that this was how I became a better and more informed Regent."

She was later asked to fill a vacancy in the Pacific region of the ACCT Board of Directors, becoming the first Nevadan to serve on the board. "Regent Del Carlo's leadership at the national level reflects her deep commitment to education and to the students our community colleges serve," Board of Regents Chair Byron Brooks said in a statement. "Her service with ACCT highlights Nevada's strong voice in shaping the future of higher education."

Del Carlo later ran for an at-large seat and moved through the executive positions of the ACCT board. She counts voting to hire Jee Hang Lee as ACCT's president and CEO and the subsequent leadership transition as a highlight of her time on the board.

"Her dedication to governance, advocacy, and student opportunity will help advance the mission of community colleges nationwide,"



The Nevada System of Higher Education surprised Regent Del Carlo at her incoming ACCT Board Chair welcome reception during the 2025 ACCT Leadership Congress in New Orleans.

Lee said in a statement. “As Chair Del Carlo often says, students are our North Star in our decision-making.”

Del Carlo points to Truckee Meadows Community College President Emerita Dr. Maria C. Sheehan as the inspiration for her focus on CEO wellbeing as ACCT Chair.

After retiring as president of the Reno community college, Sheehan has devoted her life in retirement to wellbeing. “She’s written books. She gives seminars. She coaches people. She even started weightlifting,” Del Carlo says. “She’s amazing.”

But Del Carlo believes that trustees have a special role in helping their institutions’ CEOs focus on wellbeing before they retire.

“The president’s job is glamorous to some people,” Del Carlo says. “But these are very stressful jobs, especially in our current environment where the whole value proposition of higher ed is being challenged.”

At the most basic level, Del Carlo says, trustees should “ask the person how they’re doing and be sincere about it.”

“You’re doing that out of genuine concern for that person as the leader of the institution, or just as concern as a human being,” she says. “That’s pretty basic. We can tell when someone’s stressed — we all send signals out.”

Beyond that, boards can consider providing more concrete wellness services in CEO compensation packages, such as executive physicals, memberships in health clubs, or even reimbursements for personal trainers (see p. 36 for more). “I don’t think that’s asking too much if you really care about your CEO,” Del Carlo says.

In doing this, trustees shouldn’t neglect their own wellbeing, Del Carlo says. “We’re living in a time that’s putting pressure on everyone,” she said in New Orleans. “Different people handle pressure differently, but it is not a sign of strength to ignore this reality and believe it has no effect.”

As for that leader in Nevada, Del Carlo says he “has really been working on things for the last couple of months.”

“His cholesterol, blood pressure, and weight all went down,” she says. “And he feels so much better!”

Del Carlo hopes that by promoting wellbeing, trustees across the country can ensure that their institutions remain equally capable of supporting their students.

“This impacts so many lives for the good,” she says. “It’s just a joy to have this position.”



Mark Toner is an editor for Trustee Quarterly.

INNOVATION FOR A CHANGING WORLD

The 2025 ACCT Leadership Congress focused on reimagining community colleges for a disruptive era.

By Mark Toner



HELD IN ONE OF AMERICA'S OLDEST CITIES, THE 2025 ACCT Leadership Congress focused repeatedly on the new approaches required for community colleges to navigate the post-AI world.

"We find ourselves today at a crossroads — socially, economically, and technologically," said keynote speaker Dr. Jennifer Fernandez, the dean of nursing and a former student at Delgado Community College in New Orleans. "The world of education and work is changing faster than ever before. Automation, AI, global disruption... are rewriting the rules of every single industry. At the same time, families across America are struggling... In the face of these challenges, community colleges are the answer."

More than 1,800 community college leaders attended the 2025 Congress, whose theme — Reimagining Community College — spoke to the need to find new answers.

Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry emphasized the need to respond to opportunities emerging from AI and the reshoring of manufacturing that are diversifying his state's economy and those across the country. "The thing that keeps me up at night is ensuring that we have the workforce necessary to fill those jobs," Landry said. "Step into the breach as our education systems are changing... and you will be part of writing America's next great renaissance."

Top: 2025 ACCT Chair Rich Fukutaki passes the gavel to 2026 ACCT Chair Carol Del Carlo; Bottom: ACCT Senate Meeting



Left to Right: 2025 ACCT Board Chair Rich Fukutaki; 2025 ACCT Vice Chair Pretta VanDible Stallworth; Delgado Community College Dean of Nursing and Alumna Jennifer Fernandez

AI: The Sector's 'iPhone Moment'

Rich Fukutaki warned attendees that AI and artificial general intelligence (AGI) will bring “a sea change in higher education.”

“It’s going to require a lot of us — attention, planning, engagement, and perhaps most importantly, we must support our leaders as they try out new ideas,” said Fukutaki, a trustee at Bellevue College in Washington.

Likening AI’s disruption to the societal impact of the iPhone following its debut in 2007, Dr. Claire Brady, president of Glass Half Full Consulting and cofounder of the Association of Higher Education Consulting and Coaching, told trustees that “this is our iPhone moment,” calling for community colleges “to jump in and... be absolutely the leaders in this area. You are built for this moment.”

“Your guidance has never mattered more,” Brady added. “You’re not governing a technology adoption. You’re governing a mission critical transformation that happens to be enabled by technology.”

Representatives from industry partners including Oracle, NexusEdge, SME, and Trane discussed employers’ rapidly changing needs across all fields. Fully half of jobs which include AI skills in their qualifications are now outside of the IT and computer fields, said Lucas Rae, Lightcast account executive. “It’s transformative and crossing over boundaries,” he said.

Keynote speaker Ahmad Thomas, CEO of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, urged community college leaders to “widen your aperture and be visionaries.”

“If you’re not fully on board at least in recognizing the power of this technology, you better find a way to get on the bus, because it’s moving and the opportunities are very real,” Thomas said. He stressed the importance of community colleges’ role in surfacing the

“hidden talent” among nontraditional students needed to win the global race around AI and the future of work.

“AI is here to stay, and the best chance for success is for community colleges to be the leaders and drive outcomes,” added N2N President and CEO Kiran Kodithala.

To that end, the California Community Colleges system has made AI one of just three strategic directions in its Vision 2030 roadmap for the state’s 116 community colleges. “We indicated publicly that California Community Colleges were going to really engage with the impact of generative AI within the context of teaching and learning, community education, and workforce development,” Chancellor Sonya Christian told attendees, noting that a system board member described the goal as “everything, everywhere, all at once.” The system is exploring providing credit for prior learning, much of it in AI skills and certifications, and investigating ways to promote community AI literacy for as many as 200,000 California residents.

That focus will be critical in the years to come. Brady noted that AI adoption is “80 percent about the people and 20 percent about the technology.”

“Where,” she asked, “are you putting your efforts?”

Reinventing Models for Success

AI wasn’t the only new model for teaching and learning discussed during Congress. “ChatGPT can’t fix my toilet or my AC,” Gov. Landry jokingly told attendees, noting that a wide range of skills are needed for tomorrow’s workforce.

To that end, Lumina Foundation President and CEO Jamie Merisotis celebrated community colleges’ role in dramatic



Clockwise: Silicon Valley Leadership Group CEO Ahmad Thomas; Glass Half Full Consulting President Claire Brady; Lumina Foundation CEO Jamie Merisotis; new ACCT Board members take the oath of office; ACCT's Maggie Owens, Jee Hang Lee, and Christina Simons

postsecondary attainment gains over the past few decades — but stressed that much more needs to be done.

The percentage of working-age adults with postsecondary degrees or credentials has increased from 38 to 55 percent, according to Merisotis, who called it “one of the most significant and underreported social change movements of the past two decades.”

“Trustees play an undeniable central role in all of this, from reimagining traditional business models to working even more closely with employers and businesses to expanding the leadership capacity of the people who oversee, lead, and work in community colleges, which is what this conference is all about,” he said.

Lumina’s new goal is to increase postsecondary credential attainment to 75 percent by 2040. But those credentials, Merisotis added, must have value for both students and workforce needs. “We’re shifting our focus beyond simply attaining credentials to making sure they deliver measurable financial returns and broader social benefits,” he told trustees.

Merisotis also called the 42 million Americans who have some college but no degree “an acknowledgement that many, perhaps most, of today’s students actually need support to graduate. The education system must modernize its support to today’s students, helping them to stay on track and finish their programs.”

To that end, Edmonds Community College President Amit Singh discussed the need for “lifelong advising” to accompany emerging lifelong learning offerings during a panel on new short-term credentials and custom training programs. “It’s a new kind of model where we stay in touch with you as long as it takes to get you to the next level,” he said.

Dual enrollment has emerged as another promising model for

community colleges, and during a pre-Congress session, leaders from Texas and California discussed their state’s investments in these programs and the impact on colleges, students, and communities (see p. 24).

“Ethically, it’s the right thing to do,” said Naomi Castro, director of programs for the Career Ladders Project. “Dual enrollment not only sets high expectations for young people, but they prove over and over again that they can meet those high expectations when you provide support.... If you want a skilled and critical thinking populace, and if we still value a college education, this is a reason to invest in it.”

Advocacy and Impact

The 2025 Congress took place in the middle of the longest federal government shutdown in history, lasting 43 days. While the shutdown was at an impasse at the time, “things are moving very quickly,” Carrie Warick-Smith, ACCT vice president of public policy, told attendees during a briefing on federal priorities. “That is frequently how it is during the first 100 days of any administration. But this one certainly set a new pace, and we haven’t really seen a slowdown yet.”

David Baime, AACC senior vice president of government relations, stressed that advocacy had been critical during the course of the year, helping result in better outcomes for the sector in appropriation bills and the reconciliation bill passed last summer.

“The moral of the story is that when we take our case and make our arguments to the legislature, we can be pretty successful,” Baime said. “In a time with a lot of uncertainty and turbulence, advocacy remains just as important and impactful as it ever has been.”



Clockwise: ACCT Board Meeting; ACCT President & CEO Jee Hang Lee; Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry Welcomes ACCT to New Orleans; Senate meeting; ACCT Board meeting; ACCT Board Secretary-Treasurer Tim Hardy

ACCT President and CEO Jee Hang Lee celebrated the passing of Workforce Pell after a decade of advocacy. Lee also announced the launch of a new Global Workforce Coalition to build on the association's current U.S.-U.K. Community College and Technical Education Exchange and India-U.S. Partnership Lab, as well as ACCT Excel, a new badging program that organizes governance education into pathways to build a strong foundation in governance, advocacy, legal responsibilities, and board best practices.

But advocacy wasn't just about federal priorities. Merisotis urged trustees to take on a more central role "to more effectively communicate with all our constituents... about the critical importance of higher education to our future."

"In the face of a flood of negative or distorted narratives, we've got to do a better job of telling the story of higher education in America today," he said.

The 'Heartbeat of America's Future'

On the final day of Congress, Fukutaki passed the association's ceremonial gavel to 2026 ACCT Chair Carol Del Carlo, regent of the Nevada System of Higher Education.

Del Carlo stressed the importance of ACCT's role as a leading source of information, advocacy, networking, and assistance for community college members. Pointing to Nevada's diverse economy, she noted that "community colleges are community first and community centered. We not only equip students with necessary tools... we ensure [their] basic needs are met."

To that end, Del Carlo said her priority as ACCT Chair for the upcoming year is "one specific and basic human need" — physical

and mental wellbeing, particularly for community college presidents and chancellors. "As a board member, you have an investment and a responsibility for your CEO's wellbeing — as a human being, and as a partner to their professional wellbeing," Del Carlo told trustees. "We need to invite candid discussions to ensure their needs are being met." (See p. 16.)

Closing out the 2025 Congress, Fernandez shared her story of beginning her educational journey in the same classrooms at Delgado Community College that she now oversees. Urging trustees to "lead change with compassion," she stressed the importance of the role trustees play.

"We are the bridge between dreams and reality," Fernandez said. "We are the first step for students who can't afford four-year college and the last chance for those who were told they would never make it. These students aren't looking for a shortcut, they're looking for a pathway... one that's affordable, flexible, and deeply human... Community colleges are not just a part of higher education. We are the heartbeat of America's future."



Mark Toner is an editor for Trustee Quarterly.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM DUAL ENROLLMENT

A Pre-Congress session offered strategies from California and Texas.

By Mark Toner

WITH MORE THAN 2.5 MILLION HIGH SCHOOL students nationwide now receiving college credit through dual enrollment, community colleges have found that these programs not only increase enrollment, but also shorten time to degrees and credentials, reduce costs, and build connections between education and the workforce.

“As pathways continue to evolve, there are a lot of moving parts,” Steve Jurch, vice president of the ACCT Center for Policy & Practice, said during a special pre-Congress session last fall. “Dual enrollment is one of these.”

As part of an ACCT project exploring innovative state strategies for community college funding and dual enrollment, Congress attendees learned from two states where policy and legislation have improved equitable access to these programs and forged new pathways between education and the workforce. Speakers shared findings from two ACCT reports on initiatives in California and Texas (where dual enrollment is called dual credit) and emphasized trustees’ critical role in this work.

“It’s our duty and moral imperative that students have opportunities to do dual enrollment,” said Andra Hoffman, a trustee of the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD). “It’s a win-win when you’re a trustee... it makes the community feel like their investment in your district is worthwhile.”

DUAL ENROLLMENT

More than 200 bills focused on dual enrollment and dual credit have been introduced in 45 states, but participation still varies widely from state to state. And in the absence of intentional actions, too few programs align dual enrollment with postsecondary programs of study in high-wage fields. Many have eligibility barriers such as test scores or grade, charge fees, or are found primarily in schools with large numbers of college-bound students.

ACCT studied California and Texas because both states have addressed these issues through legislation, funding, and new models. Texas House Bill 8, legislation that introduced a dynamic community college funding formula tied to student completion of a postsecondary credential of value in the labor market, includes incentives helping high school students complete 15 or more college credits and made dual enrollment courses free for lower-income students. California

has heavily invested in dual enrollment pathways over the past decade, setting ambitious statewide goals for students to earn 12 college credits upon graduation from high school, introducing students to college-level coursework as early as 9th grade, and creating new pathways for early college and career exposure.

Effective Dual Enrollment/Dual Credit Programs:

- Are structured on coherent sequences that create pathways – no “random acts of dual enrollment”
- Explicitly target underrepresented students
- Remove tuition and fee barriers
- Provide tailored supports, including advising, counseling, career exploration, tutoring, and college readiness skills
- Are aligned with labor market demand and/or CTE programs
- Emphasize momentum by promoting 15 credits/term
- Address capacity issues that limit dual enrollment participation (teacher certifications)

THE TRUSTEE ROLE

Across the country, trustees and other advocates can use strategies from these states to advocate for dual enrollment programs that emphasize access and pathways aligned with postsecondary programs of study and careers. Here are key takeaways shared by educators and policymakers in Texas and California during the workshop:

Advocate for dual enrollment as a key driver of postsecondary outcomes.

In Texas, advocacy around HB8 and dual credit were connected to changing workforce needs in the fast-growing state, particularly the growth of middle skill jobs that require some postsecondary education or a certificate. The legislation was a “recognition statewide that we needed a big swing,” said Del Mar College Board Chair Carol Scott.

Connecting dual enrollment to workforce needs can also help address well-documented public concerns about the value of higher education, added Ray Martinez, president and CEO of the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC).

Participants urged trustees to find advocacy partners, including chambers of commerce and public-private workforce initiatives. In California, dual enrollment initiatives are funded across multiple K-12 and economic development streams, representing “a powerful aligned strategic vision among leaders across the state,” said consultant Amy Ellen Duke-Benfield, the reports’ author.

Emphasize coherence across K-12, higher ed, and the workforce.

In Texas, dual credit was envisioned as one of three key cross-cutting planks across K-16 — credentials of value, transfer, and dual credit. “We don’t think of dual credit as its own silo. We wanted coherence through the continuum,” said Martinez.

Focus on equitable access to dual enrollment programs.

While dual enrollment often primarily supports college-bound students, both Texas and California have “taken the intentional approach of including more than just that population,” Duke-Benfield said.

“Dual enrollment was a boutique program for students who are high achievers,” said Andrea Hoffman, a trustee for the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD). “I think it’s a moral imperative to reach out and ensure that we’re including all students in our programs.”

In California, cut scores or GPA requirements for dual enrollment are prohibited. Expanded access has led in some places to a two-generation approach, with parents enrolling in noncredit adult education courses after seeing their children succeed in college-level classes, according to Hoffman.

Programs have been designed for underrepresented students “who do not think of themselves as college students,” said Dr. Naomi Castro, director of programs at the Career Ladders Project. “That’s really an intervention strategy.”

Advocate for targeted supports.

To succeed in college-level courses, high school students need targeted supports, including advising, counseling, career exploration, tutoring, and college readiness skills. “If you’re going to put high school students in these courses, it can’t be without support — that’s just not responsible,” said Dr. Mike Muñoz, president and superintendent of the Long Beach Community College District.

Supports are especially important when programs extend to earlier grades. Many California districts focus on a 9th grade strategy, with dual enrollment students in Los Angeles taking a “College 100” course focused on navigating pathways from college to career, Hoffman said.

Extensive supports require dedicated staff — and new staffing models. In Long Beach, for example, success teams include high school teachers who help college faculty with classroom management, high school counselors, college student success coaches, and graduate interns who provide intensive supports, such as calling students to make sure they complete homework, said Muñoz. The high-touch approach drove success rates to 87 percent and has erased racial equity gaps, he said.

“Dual enrollment not only sets high expectations for young people, but they prove over and over again that they can meet those high expectations when you provide support,” Castro said.

Ensure dual enrollment aligns with CTE programs.

Since HB8 became law in Texas, the number of dual credit students in Kilgore College CTE programs such as a patient care technician program has increased by 90 percent, and students who complete the program receive one of several certifications along with college credit, according to President Brenda Kays. “Students are going to be leading high school with a head start,” she said.

At the same time, even non-CTE programs should be focused on career. “You don’t want to think of CTE and non CTE — it’s all career,” Castro said.

Support participating high school districts and help them build capacity.

“The joke is we’re going to be the Nordstroms of customer service — meet the high schools where they are,” Muñoz says. To that end, Del Mar College hired a retired K-12 superintendent to work with districts in its service area, Scott said.

Along with working closely with high school counselors, finding ways for more K-12 teachers to become certified to teach college-level courses is critical to expanding dual credit programs. In California, a coalition of districts used regional funding to train teachers, including free access to coursework and online options to “meet teachers where they are,” Duke-Benfield said. In Texas, Kilgore College is looking at ways to fast track credentialing K-12 faculty, according to Kays.

Ensure dual enrollment is addressed in the college’s strategic plan.

For dual enrollment to be successful at scale, college leaders must commit to intentional planning. “To achieve that, you have to think about where it fits into your overall strategic management plan,” said Muñoz, whose institutions are adding 1,000 new dual enrollment students each year.

To that end, trustees can implement participation goals at the college or district level. They can remove barriers like test scores, add advising supports, and address barriers.

This work requires leadership support at all levels. At Southwestern College, faculty was initially resistant to having 7th and 8th graders on campus. “Now they’re asking me how we can expand programming,” said Mark Sanchez, president and superintendent. “We have to see the things as visionary leaders that [other] people can’t.”

Trustees are in a unique position to advocate for dual enrollment programs and ensure they are equitable and aligned with communities’ workforce needs.

“The pipeline to postsecondary education is dual enrollment,” Castro said. “If you want a skilled and critical thinking populace, if we still value a college education, this is a reason to invest in it.”

Download the briefs on Texas and California at acct.org/center-for-policy-practice/Texas-California-Strategy.



Mark Toner is an editor for Trustee Quarterly.

REFRAMING HIGHER EDUCATION TO ALIGN WITH LABOR MARKET DEMAND

Leaders at two Wisconsin institutions forge a shared commitment to
'translate credits into careers and experience into impact.'

By Sunem Beaton-Garcia and Katherine Frank



Dr. Sunem Beaton-Garcia, president of Chippewa Valley Technical College, left, and Dr. Katherine Frank, chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Stout, celebrate the remodel of CVTC's Menomonie campus during a ribbon-cutting ceremony on September 15. The two leaders have collaborated closely to enhance educational opportunities for students.

AS LEADERS OF institutions committed to preparing the next generation of skilled professionals, we find ourselves aligned as regional partners at a decisive moment in the evolution of American higher education. We acknowledge that higher education is changing, that this is a good thing, and that we are uniquely positioned to reframe what higher education means in a 21st-century economy.

It's time to reframe higher education. The future isn't about competing models; it's about complementary missions that support all learners, at every stage, and help them turn their education into a lifelong advantage.

In place of perceived rigid educational silos, a more dynamic ecosystem is emerging. One where credentials are increasingly stackable, learning is lifelong, and value is measured not solely by credit hours earned, but by competencies gained and career opportunities unlocked at different points in time that are flexible to learners. This is particularly true at the intersection of technical education as offered at Chippewa Valley Technical College and polytechnic learning and research at the University of Wisconsin-Stout.

Together, our institutions serve as launchpads for students and professionals of all backgrounds to enter the workforce, upskill, or transition into new careers. Our aligned missions are not just to educate, but also to connect education directly to employment. Whether a student is earning an industry certification, an associate degree, a bachelor's degree, or a graduate degree, the ultimate goals remain the same: to make the on and off ramps for students seamless as they navigate educational pathways, and to empower individuals with the knowledge, skills and experience to thrive in today's — and tomorrow's — economy.

What sets technical colleges like CVTC and polytechnic universities like UW-Stout apart is our intentional focus on aligning learning with labor market demand across our entire program array. We are uniquely equipped to translate credits into careers and experience into impact. From advanced manufacturing and cybersecurity to healthcare and clean energy technologies, our institutions respond rapidly to evolving industry needs and emerging technologies such as the integration of artificial intelligence and automation.

Moreover, we are actively breaking down barriers between credentials by recognizing a wider range of qualifications. The future of higher education is not linear. It's modular, flexible, and deeply connected to industry. A student may start with a short-term credential and then stack that into an associate degree at a technical college, and go on to pursue a bachelor's, graduate, or professional degree at a polytechnic university — all while working and gaining real-world experience. This fluidity is no longer the exception. It's

the new norm through strong transfer agreements and program alignment between CVTC and UW-Stout.

As we look to the future, higher education must be reframed. Not as a one-size-fits-all model rooted in tradition, but as an agile, inclusive system that meets learners where they are and takes them where they want to go. Credentials must be transparent, portable, and a return on investment. Equally important, every student must see a clear connection among what they are learning today, the opportunities that await them tomorrow, and the impact they will have on society.

This is where our institutions excel. At the heart of our work is a shared belief that education should be transformational for the individual learner, their families, their communities, and the broader economy. Our institutions are not just adapting to change; we are driving it.

It's time to reframe higher education. The future isn't about competing models; it's about complementary missions that support all learners, at every stage, and help them turn their education into a lifelong advantage. Together, we are building a model that is more responsive, equitable, and aligned with the needs of a rapidly changing world.

As we welcome new and continuing students this fall, and into the future, we do so with pride in our shared commitment to the communities we serve. Our campuses are more than places of learning. They are engines of opportunity and hubs of innovation. Together we are catalysts for a stronger, more vibrant future for all.

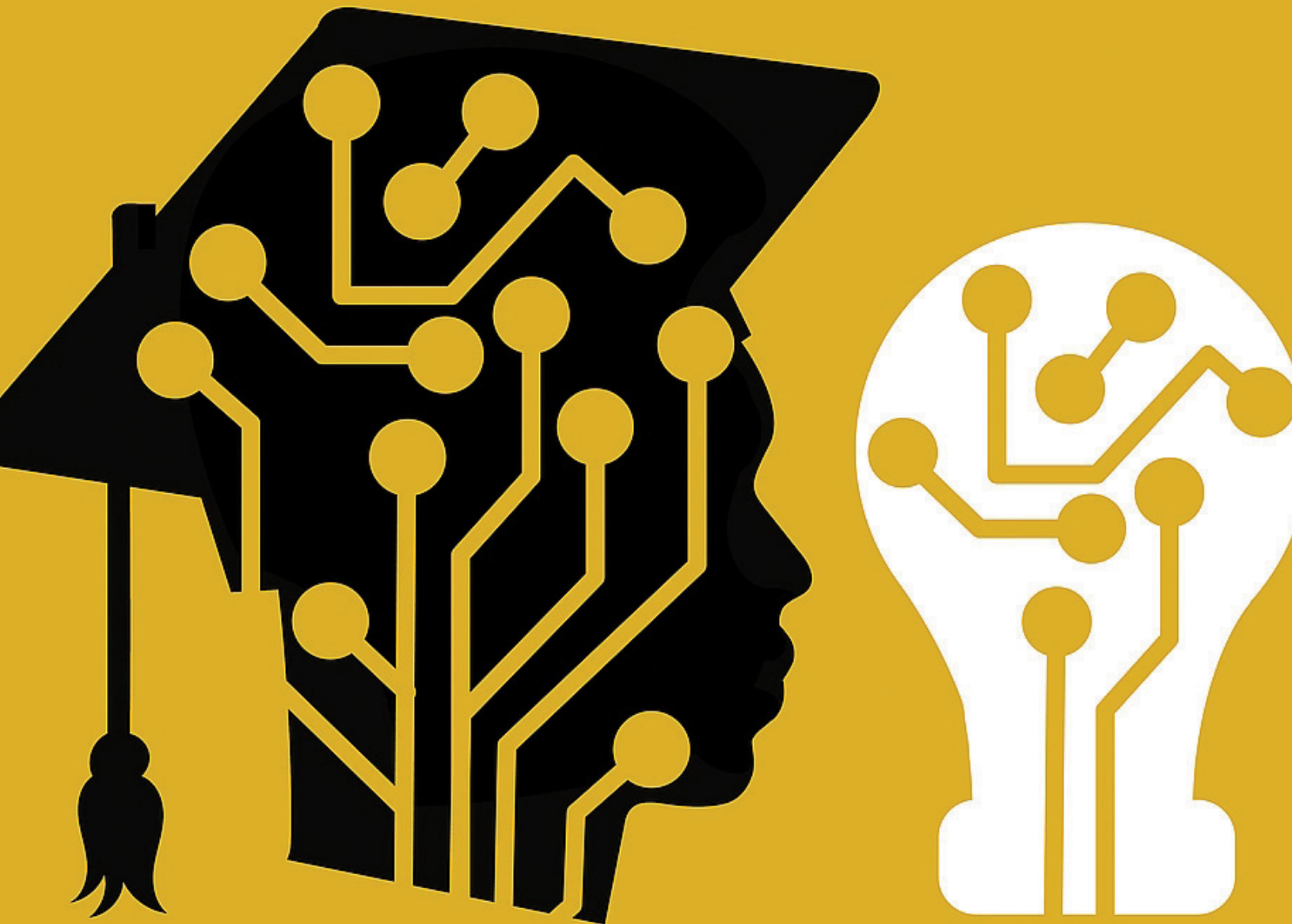


Dr. Sunem Beaton-Garcia is president of Chippewa Valley Technical College based in Eau Claire, Wis. Dr. Katherine Frank is chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Stout in Menomonie, Wis.

RESPONSIBLE AI LEADERSHIP IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

What trustees need to know about pedagogy, governance,
and environmental impact.

By Lisa A. Clark



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) IS RAPIDLY RESHAPING higher education, and community colleges now find themselves at the center of conversations about innovation, ethics, and long-term sustainability. As AI adoption grows rapidly, trustees are being asked to steward decisions with far-reaching implications, not only for technology strategy, but also for pedagogy, workforce readiness, data governance, and environmental responsibility.

For many boards, this moment feels both promising and overwhelming. AI's potential is real, but so are the concerns. Trustees do not necessarily need technical expertise. They need a clear understanding of AI's impact on teaching and learning, how governance structures mitigate risk, and why environmental considerations matter. With this clarity, boards can guide mission-aligned innovation.

What AI Really Means for Teaching and Learning

While headlines focus on novelty, AI's real influence lies in reshaping teaching and learning. Used responsibly, it streamlines faculty workload, reduces burnout, and creates time for deeper student engagement. AI can support formative practice, provide targeted feedback, and help deliver personalized learning paths that many community college students rely on.

Faculty across the country, including at Wake Technical Community College in North Carolina, are already exploring AI through governance-guided pilots and clear usage expectations. Their work reinforces a key point: AI is not automation for automation's sake; it is a tool that helps faculty strengthen engagement and learning.

For trustees, the question becomes less about *"What AI tools are we using?"* and more about *"How does AI improve learning and support faculty?"* This reframing keeps student success at the center of decision-making.

Responsible Governance: The Backbone of Ethical AI Use

As AI tools are more widely accepted across campuses, governance is the anchor that ensures equity, transparency, and alignment. Effective structures often include AI committees, usage policies, review processes, and cross-functional oversight. These clarify:

- When and how AI is used
- What data is collected and protected
- Who monitors and evaluates usage
- How students, faculty, and staff are trained
- How ethical principles are applied consistently

Frameworks such as Anthology's Trustworthy AI Approach emphasize human oversight, privacy, and transparency — which are all values community colleges already embrace. These guardrails help institutions adopt AI thoughtfully rather than reactively, reducing risk and enhancing trust. Trustees do not write AI policies, but they ensure those policies exist, reflect institutional values, and are developed collaboratively. Governance supports compliance, reduces liability, and keeps AI aligned with mission and strategy.

Environmental Impact: Cutting Through the Noise

Trustees are increasingly asked about AI's environmental footprint. Public discussions often lack nuance, creating misconceptions. Emerging research shows that while AI uses energy, primarily through data centers, its current global carbon contribution is relatively small compared with major industries like transportation or agriculture. A single AI text query consumes roughly the same energy as running a small LED bulb for a few seconds.

Still, energy demands will grow as usage expands. Understanding environmental implications helps boards evaluate vendor partnerships, cloud strategies, and sustainability planning. Transparent reporting from technology providers is becoming essential. The message is not that AI poses imminent environmental risk, but that responsible adoption requires environmental awareness. Trustees who ask informed questions will position their institutions to balance innovation with stewardship.

Building AI Literacy Across Campus

Trustees are seeing that AI readiness depends as much on people as on technology. Faculty, staff, and students need structured opportunities to build AI literacy, including:

- Understanding AI's benefits and limitations
- Knowing when AI is appropriate, and when it is not
- Applying ethical practices
- Evaluating AI-generated content
- Recognizing environmental considerations

AI literacy supports academic integrity, equity, digital citizenship, and workforce preparation. Investment in training and communication enables confident, responsible use and reduces misuse.

Leading With Purpose in an AI-Enabled Future

AI represents a meaningful transformation opportunity for community colleges. With thoughtful leadership, it can strengthen teaching and learning, support faculty, and expand access, thus opening new pathways to student success. Trustees who proactively engage by asking strategic questions, supporting governance, and balancing opportunity with ethics will undoubtedly help their colleges innovate with integrity.

By embracing a responsible approach grounded in ethics, pedagogy, and environmental stewardship, boards can ensure AI adoption remains mission-aligned, future-ready, and reflective of the community college values they uphold. In doing so, they position their institutions to not only adapt to change, but to also lead it with purpose.



Lisa A. Clark, Ed.D. is associate vice president of academic innovation at Blackboard.

PRACTICAL ACTIONS TRUSTEES CAN TAKE NOW

Trustees should ask strategic questions that guide responsible decision-making. As boards review AI initiatives, they may consider the following actions:

Ask leadership how AI aligns with institutional mission and student success goals.

Technology should serve the institution, not the other way around.

Ensure there is a clear governance structure for AI use.

Policies, review processes, and oversight mechanisms should be transparent and widely communicated.

Request clarity on how AI impacts faculty workload and student engagement.

AI should reduce faculty burnout and support high-quality instruction.

Review how the institution is approaching AI literacy.

Faculty, staff, and students all play a role in responsible use.

Inquire about environmental considerations.

Trustees should understand what vendors report, how models differ in efficiency, and how sustainability goals intersect with AI use.

Encourage transparency and continuous evaluation.

AI adoption is not a one-time decision. It requires ongoing assessment and open communication.

Trustee Questions Checklist Questions Trustees Should Ask Their Presidents About AI



How does our use of AI align with our mission and submit success priorities?



What governance structures and policies guide AI use across the college?



How is AI supporting faculty, particularly workload and student engagement?



How are we building AI literacy for faculty, staff, and students?



What data privacy measures are in place with AI tools and vendors?



How are we evaluating the environmental impact of the AI tools we adopt?



2026 Governance Leadership Institute

Strengthening the Leadership Team of the Board

March 18–20

Hosted by Miami Dade College–Wolfson Campus, Miami, Florida

Register at acct.org/events/2026GLI

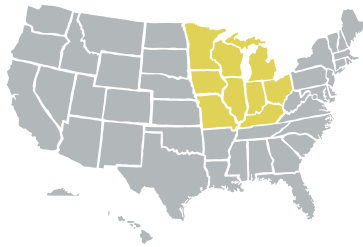
ACCT recommends that the board chair, vice chair, and college CEO attend this Institute as a team. Additional members of the board and professional board staff are welcome to attend, as well.

Topics Include:

- Best Practices of Highly Effective Boards
- The Role of the Board Chair
- How to Build a Strong Relationship Between the CEO and the Board
- The Chair's Role During a Crisis
- Succession Planning for the Board – Choosing Your Next Chair
- And More!



AROUND THE REGIONS



CENTRAL REGION

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) announced \$24 million in grant funding to establish six new Manufacturing Training Academies at community colleges in the state's downstate regions to expand training for high-demand manufacturing jobs.

The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) announced \$9.3 million in Innovative Bridge and Transition (IBT) grants to expand access to bridge programming, adult education pathways, wraparound supports, and transition services designed to meet the needs of learners and employers.

Iowa lawmakers have filed legislation allowing community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees based on local needs, with community college leaders pointing to "education deserts" in their service areas.

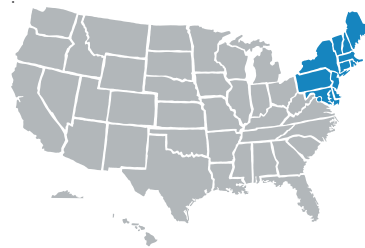
Massachusetts awarded \$3.6 million to support students with disabilities across the state's public colleges and universities through the Massachusetts Inclusive Postsecondary Education (MAIPSE) programs. The funding aims to reduce barriers for students with developmental and intellectual disabilities, allowing them to engage in undergraduate courses, internships, and on-campus activities.

The **Michigan** Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity launched a statewide College Credit for Apprenticeship initiative, allowing residents who complete registered building trades apprenticeships to earn college credit toward a degree or technical certificate.

Five **Ohio** community colleges are joining a

national push to explore how their schools can offer more eight-week classes, including Columbus State Community College, Edison State Community College, Hocking College, Lorain County Community College and Northwest State Community College.

Ohio's largest community colleges cut dozens of programs in response to Senate Bill 1, which requires institutions to report which programs don't meet the law's minimum benchmark of averaging more than five graduates per year over a three-year period.



NORTHEAST REGION

A collaboration with over 50 leaders from **Maine's** construction, education and workforce sectors — along with the Maine Community College System — is expanding short-term training programs to help fill key labor shortages across the state. The Construction Industry Workforce Partnership is the first of several sector partnerships designed to deliver targeted training in Maine's highest-demand fields. Health care and manufacturing sector partnerships will launch next.

New Jersey's state-funded Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) has helped more than 50,000 students from lower-income backgrounds pursue an associate degree between 2019 and 2024, according to a new report. A separate report says the state's Some College, No Credential initiative, which launched in 2022, has reached more than 280,000 adults, with more than 13,500 learners re-enrolling in 22 colleges and universities in New Jersey, including 11 community colleges.

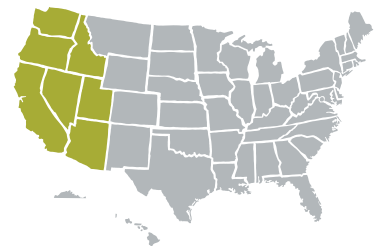
The New Jersey Council of County Colleges launched a year-round Feed the Future:

Fight Student Hunger fundraising campaign to help the state's community colleges address food insecurity among some of their students.

The State University of **New York** announced the SUNY Military Tuition Rate Program, a new system-wide initiative that ensures that those currently serving can access SUNY undergraduate degree and microcredential programs in person or online without additional costs or barriers.

Howard Community College in **Maryland** announced a \$2.2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Title III Strengthening Institutions Program to develop the Howard Hub for Student Success, a comprehensive, integrated approach to student support services.

Pennsylvania's Community College of Philadelphia will be the first institution of higher education to embed voter registration into its student application process, administrators announced.



PACIFIC REGION

Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs announced a new partnership between the Arizona Department of Homeland Security (AZDOHS) and Pima Community College to launch the Cybersecurity Talent Ready AZ Initiative and mark the opening of the state's first community college-based center dedicated to real-time cyber threat monitoring and workforce training.

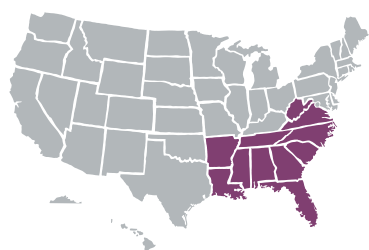
Beginning in 2027, Arizona's Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD) will launch multiple new bachelor's degrees every year for five consecutive years, with the goal of reaching about 25 programs.

California's 2026-27 state budget proposed by Gov. Gavin Newsom includes an unanticipated \$22 billion in additional funding for TK-12 and community colleges, thanks to robust tax receipts tied to wealth from artificial intelligence companies. Last fall, Newsom signed Assembly Bill 648, legislation aimed at making it easier for California's community colleges to build housing for students, faculty, and staff.

A partnership between the University of **Hawaii** and the Department of Education will provide high school seniors with guaranteed admissions to the system's seven community colleges.

Colleges and universities across **Washington** are bracing for cuts proposed by Gov. Bob Ferguson. Ferguson suggested cuts of 1.5% for regional universities and community colleges.

Six Washington community colleges will receive \$9.26 million from the federal Inflation Reduction Act to expand and develop new curriculum related to the management of natural resources, support tribal students at community colleges, and build a pipeline of technicians, directors and other workers at Washington tribes or state agencies.



SOUTHERN REGION

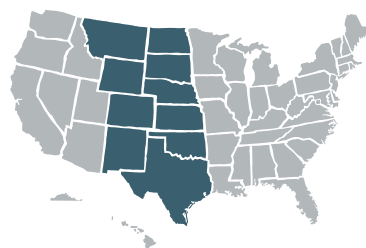
The **Alabama** Commission on Higher Education approved more than \$2.7 billion in budget requests for the 2027 fiscal year, including a \$30 million increase for community colleges.

North Carolina Gov. Josh Stein directed the Governor's Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships to make recommendations to effectively implement the newly created Workforce

Pell grants to help North Carolina students take advantage of additional career training opportunities.

A study estimates the **South Carolina** Technical College System generates approximately \$6.4 billion in annual economic impact statewide & supports more than 38,000 jobs each year. The study also found that graduates of South Carolina's technical colleges are significantly more likely to stay in the state and participate in the workforce.

Virginia officials reached an agreement with the Justice Department in its effort to bar undocumented students from receiving in-state tuition, sparking criticism from advocacy groups and the incoming Democratic state attorney general.



WESTERN REGION

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis called on the legislature to replace the Department of Higher Education with a new state agency that would provide a one-stop shop for all post-secondary education options. Polis says the new department would provide easy-to-access information about all the different paths and programs to launch a new career or advance a current one

Colorado will launch a new initiative to help rural college students, using \$5.6 million in donations to create a statewide consortium focused on expanding rural work-based learning opportunities, such as internships, apprenticeships, clinical experiences, or project-based learning.

Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen signed an executive order to launch his Good Life, Great Careers initiative, crediting the state's "six extraordinary community colleges that are game changing to make sure that no kid gets left behind and that our kids can get skill sets that are transformative so they have incredible careers."

The **Oklahoma** State Regents of Higher Education approved Tulsa Community College's Bachelor of Science in Child Development degree. The college plans to offer its first bachelor's degree program in fall 2026, provided it gets final approval from its accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission.

The Alamo Colleges District in **Texas** is creating a School for Online Learning, which will unify over 160 online programs under a single, coordinated framework to ensure consistency, connection and quality across the district's five primary campuses.

Around the Regions provides an opportunity to share what's happening in the states and around the regions. This section focuses on state legislative and budgetary issues, economic development, and finance. Please e-mail items from press releases or newsletters to ACCT at acctinfo@acct.org.

Legal Issues Impacting Community Colleges

First Amendment issues, antidiscrimination statutes, student athletics, and disparate impact cases are among recent developments.

BY IRA MICHAEL SHEPARD, ACCT GENERAL COUNSEL

The U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission (EEOC) announced in a memo to staff that it planned to administratively close most pending unintentional discrimination/disparate impact cases and investigations.

THE FOLLOWING RECENT LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS ARE IMPORTANT TO the day-to-day administration of community colleges throughout the country. All developments were current as of the publication date but are subject to change. This article does not provide legal advice; all readers are advised to seek legal guidance from their institution's legal advisors before acting on any of the topics discussed herein.

Appeals court revives lecturer's free speech lawsuit involving controversial off-campus speech, citing lack of disruption to the teaching process. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit reversed a trial judge's dismissal of a lecturer's First Amendment claims that his public university employer violated the First Amendment when it failed to renew his contract following public disclosure of his alt-right views expressed off campus, including praising Hitler. The appeals court concluded that the record did not



"A lawyer unpaid is justice denied."

support a conclusion that student disapproval of the lecturer's speech "disrupted the administration of the university." (*Jorjani v. N.J. Institute of Technology*, 3rd Cir. No. 24-02588, 9/8/25).

The court concluded that disputes between the lecturer and his teaching colleagues and administrators over his off-campus speech, which was recorded at a pub and publicly disclosed by the New York Times, are not the type of "disruption" required to override free speech rights. The court concluded that these disputes were "reasoned debate," not "disruption." The case was remanded back to the trial court for further disposition.

Unpaid mentors are not employees subject to protection under federal anti-discrimination statutes. The U.S. Supreme Court denied hearing and therefore let stand a 5th Circuit Court of Appeals decision denying an unpaid university mentor the ability to sue for sex discrimination under Title VII. The Fifth Circuit concluded that the plaintiff was not an employee given her unpaid status and not subject to federal anti-discrimination law protection (*Wessels Wells v. Texas Tech University*, US No. 24-10518, cert denied, 10/6/25; Texas Tech waived its right to oppose cert.)

The Fifth Circuit dismissed the plaintiff's discrimination claims, holding that failure to allege that the plaintiff was paid a salary or given other financial benefits while serving as a mentor was necessary to conclude that she was an "employee" subject to Title VII protection. In denying to hear this matter, the Supreme Court let stand a division in the circuits on this issue. Five circuits (the 5th, 2nd, 4th, 8th, and 10th) have denied unpaid workers the ability to use the federal anti-discrimination statutes. Only the 6th and 9th circuits have ruled that remuneration is only one factor in determining whether a worker is an employee subject to federal anti-discrimination statute protection and does not automatically exclude them from protection. As a result, the question of whether unpaid workers are subject to Title VII and other federal anti-discrimination law protection will depend on where the alleged employee is employed.

Female athletes appeal challenge to the \$2.8 billion NCAA antitrust settlement on Title IX grounds. A small group of four female athletes have appealed the U.S. District Court's approval of the NCAA \$2.8 billion settlement of the antitrust NIL (Name, Image, Likeness) litigation to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The female athletes are arguing that the court-approved settlement excluded all Title IX considerations and awarded over 90% of the \$2.8 billion settlement to male athletes (*House v. NCAA*, 9th Cir., No. 45-2137, Appellants Briefs filed 10/29/25).

The four female athletes pointed out that the settlement approved by the federal district court trial judge would net them between \$188 and \$456, while male athletes will largely receive tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars. Under the settlement, institutions in the five most competitive sports conferences can share up to 22 percent of annual sports revenue with college athletes, or about \$20 million at each Division I institution. The back pay settlement of \$2.75 Billion

would be paid over 10 years to Division I athletes participating since 2016. Attorneys representing the plaintiff athletes who negotiated the multi-billion dollar settlement have stated that Title IX claims are irrelevant to an antitrust settlement.

Teacher loses retaliatory discharge claim that firing for refusal to use pronouns aligned with student's gender identity violates her First Amendment rights. A California K-12 teacher lost her First Amendment retaliatory discharge lawsuit against the school district's administrators and board members after arguing that her discharge for refusal to use pronouns that align with a student's gender identity violated her First Amendment rights. The federal court ruled that the school district's administrators and board members had qualified immunity which insulated them from the lawsuit (*Ramirez v. Oakland Unified School Dist.*, N.D. Cal. No. 3:24-cv-09223, 10/20/25).

The teacher was a kindergarten teacher who refused to use male pronouns as instructed by the student's parents, claiming that the use violated her religious beliefs and her First Amendment free speech rights. The plaintiff, who was Catholic, also filed a religious discrimination lawsuit under Title VII alleging that the determination constituted religious discrimination. The court also dismissed the Title VII claim, holding that the plaintiff waited too long to file suit. The court rejected the plaintiff's claim that the EEOC's notice of right to sue was sent to a wrong address as lacking proof.

EEOC to administratively close most "unintentional" disparate impact cases under investigation. The U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission (EEOC) announced in a memo to staff that it planned to administratively close most pending unintentional discrimination/disparate impact cases and investigations by September 30, 2025. The memo instructed EEOC staff to conclude most disparate impact cases and issue a "right to sue" letter to the charging party allowing it to pursue the claim with his or her own counsel in federal district Court by October 31, 2015. This is the latest EEOC enforcement shift adopted by the agency in response to the current administration's executive orders. Separately, the EEOC has already begun curtaining the litigation and processing claims of transgender discrimination pursuant to the Trump Administration directive that the government recognizes that there are only two sexes.



Ira Michael Shepard is Of Counsel with the law firm of Saul Ewing, LLP, in Washington, D.C., and ACCT's General Counsel.

How Benefits Help Boards Find and Keep a Strong CEO

An executive recruitment expert explains how to attract and retain the best fit to lead your college.

By Cindy Lopez



OFFERING A STRONG CEO COMPENSATION PACKAGE is important for attracting and retaining leadership talent that can effectively run a college, maintain a positive campus culture, and improve student outcomes. This article includes a broad list of different types of benefits that can be considered when developing or amending a CEO contract.

Of course, what might attract or retain a CEO may vary depending on geography, state limitations, where a president or chancellor is in their career, or how the benefits compare to where they were previously, among other factors. Retirement benefits may be of higher importance to those in the second half of their careers, while generous leave and family benefits may be higher priority for CEOs in the early part of their careers. Colleges or systems in states with more limited retirement options or benefits may need to complement these with additional offerings to attract their talent needs. And, of course, colleges also must work within the limitations of their budgets. The important thing is that boards allow for flexibility in the negotiation process so they do not lose an exceptional candidate.

Diverse Types of Benefits for Consideration

Below is an array of benefits beyond the base salary that boards may want to consider as they decide what their offer could — or will — include. As a good financial practice, ACCT recommends that boards cost and track the annual value of each type of benefit to have a clear picture of the overall financial value of the president's compensation package. Also, state laws vary, so consult with your legal counsel early in the search process.

Bonuses

College CEOs may receive performance-based (based on a set of measurable goals within certain timeframes), longevity-based (for example, at one or multiple milestone years), or guaranteed annual bonuses. Bonuses might be paid at a set rate or as a percentage of the CEO's salary. They could be paid either outright or as deferred income, such as in a tax-sheltered retirement account.

Retirement Benefits

Matching pension contributions can offset state pension limitations and strengthen long-term retention for late-career and nationally competitive college CEOs. Colleges may be able to provide an annual employer match (X% of base salary) into a supplemental retirement vehicle (403(b), 457(b), or annuity), independent of employee contributions.

In addition, a supplemental 403(b) contribution can align CEO compensation with foundation, system, and private-sector executive standards. Colleges may be able to provide a fixed annual contribution or X% of base salary into a 403(b) or equivalent plan, independent of employee contributions.

Health Benefit Options

Attractive health benefit options include full or partial premium coverage for the CEO, premium coverage for spouse and/or family, coverage of health costs, such as out-of-pocket costs (possibly up to a maximum), and/or coverage for annual executive health evaluation, health benefits beyond what is provided to other senior executive staff, and/or supplemental executive medical insurance. Some colleges also provide for a post-retirement health care package.

Life Insurance/Disability

Important insurance benefits include coverage of the annual premium for life insurance, coverage for spouse and/or other family members, higher maximum coverage than that provided to other executive staff, and supplemental executive life insurance coverage. Disability coverage, including all the considerations provided above, often is provided.

Other Insurance

Directors and officers (D&O) insurance should include coverage for the college CEO.

Housing Benefits

Provision of house/apartment, home maintenance costs, security system, monthly housing subsidy, or a combination of these make a college CEO position more competitive. This provision can either be for a set amount of time (the first year as CEO, for example) or for the duration of the CEO's tenure.

If home maintenance cost coverage is included, contract language or a policy outlining what is excluded and when special approvals are required is good practice.

Auto Benefits

Provision of vehicle, insurance coverage, maintenance coverage, gas coverage (usually with a designated limit), monthly vehicle subsidy, or a combination of these, is an appealing benefit to busy college CEOs. We generally recommend contract language or a policy regarding age for vehicle replacement.

Leave Benefits

Standard paid time off aligned with what other senior executive leadership staff receive, the provision of additional paid time leave (sick and/or vacation leave) exclusive to the CEO, and payout for unused leave upon departure from the college are common CEO benefits.

Annual Vacation Buybacks

Offering an annual buyback of unused vacation time recognizes executive workload while controlling fiscal exposure. Colleges may be able to allow annual conversion of up to 10 to 15 unused vacation days into either cash at the current daily rate or a contribution to a tax-deferred retirement account (with a cap on the total annual value).

There are numerous options the board can use to properly reward and compensate the CEO and provide retention incentives to maintain stable leadership. It is advisable to examine all options and create a package that allows the board long-term flexibility.

Sabbaticals

Sabbaticals are typically paid time off for a prescribed period of time that can be offered in a variety of ways: a one-time opportunity, periodically, for short durations, or for longer durations. Sabbaticals may be offered for rest, personal or professional growth, learning, or travel. They could be a standing option (for every ten years of service, for example) or can be a single offering.

Professional Development

Wise boards include budget for professional development and/or coaching for the CEO.

Academic Benefits

Scholarship funds/tuition waivers for one or more children of the CEO at the college or a stipend for private K-12 schooling may be appealing benefits.

Club Fees

Coverage of annual club membership(s) to private or public clubs may hold appeal to a prospective college CEO, and these can be great opportunities for the chief executive to establish and cultivate relationships with local leaders that can benefit the college. These may include social clubs, such as country clubs, or community organization clubs, such as Rotary.

Expense Allowance

Coverage of the cost of CEO participation in meetings and conferences related to their work and/or specially curated for presidents and/or dues for professional or service organizations, make a CEO position more competitive. The board should establish whether the expense allowance includes reimbursement for the travel of the CEO's spouse or significant other, as these are common requests.

Retirement and Beyond

Retirement benefits provide the employee with certain significant benefits at termination of employment and thus can serve as a vote of confidence and a stabilizing and reassuring force for CEOs while they serve the college. Such provisions may include emeritus status, a

consulting contract for up to a year to assist with the transition between college CEOs, a paid post-retirement sabbatical, and/or some level of staff support.

If provided, these post-retirement benefits must be clearly defined.

Financial, Tax, and Estate-Planning Services

Financial services also can be very attractive benefits.

Examine All Options

There are numerous options the board can use to properly reward and compensate the CEO and provide retention incentives to maintain stable leadership. It is advisable to examine all options and create a package that allows the board long-term flexibility. In a search for a college CEO, it can be beneficial for the board to share any attractive benefits that would be provided to a new president with the search firm supporting the search so they can share these with potential candidates who might not otherwise consider the opportunity.

The language used to draft the CEO contract matters, so a board should work closely with the board or college attorney to be sure the CEO contract protects the college and the board as well as meeting the needs of the best-suited CEO.



ACCT Director of Search Services and Tribal College Initiatives Cindy Lopez can be reached at clopez@acct.org.

EXECUTIVE SEARCH

The staff and consultants of the Association of Community College Trustees are pleased to have assisted in the search for the following community college executive officers.



KEWEENAW BAY OJIBWA COMMUNITY COLLEGE, MICHIGAN

MELISSA KIESEWETTER

President

"We're thrilled to welcome Ms. Kiese Wetter to our community. Her leadership and expertise will be instrumental as we continue to grow and advance our mission. Melissa brings a wealth of strengths and knowledge to the college, including strong communication skills, extensive experience in higher education, meaningful connections with tribal nations whose ancestral lands encompass what is now known as Michigan, and a deep understanding of the state's legislative landscape."

— KEITH ROLOF, CHAIR

BOARD OF REGENTS, KEWEENAW BAY OJIBWA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

MAYLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE, NORTH CAROLINA

DR. ARON GABRIEL

President

"We are pleased to have Dr. Gabriel as the next president of Mayland Community College and look forward to working with him as we continue to serve the people of Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey counties. We believe that he will continue the strong tradition of academic excellence and community involvement that Mayland has established, and we are excited for what the future holds."

— BRYAN PETERSON, CHAIR

BOARD OF TRUSTEES, MAYLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE



EXECUTIVE SEARCH

The staff and consultants of the Association of Community College Trustees are pleased to have assisted in the search for the following community college executive officers.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

DR. ALYCIA MARSHALL

President



"As Chair of the Board of Trustees, I am proud to officially welcome Dr. Alycia Marshall as the seventh president of Community College of Philadelphia. After a nationwide search, it has become evident that Dr. Marshall demonstrates the clear vision and outstanding leadership needed to guide our institution forward. I look forward to continue working with Dr. Marshall, and to the positive impact she will have on our students, faculty, staff, and the broader community."

— HAROLD T. EPPS, CHAIR

BOARD OF TRUSTEES, COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF PHILADELPHIA



RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

DR. STAR RIVERA-LACEY

Deputy Chancellor and Provost

"Dr. Star Rivera-Lacey is an exceptional and visionary leader whose commitment to student success and educational equity aligns perfectly with RCCD's mission and values. Her experience and passion for serving diverse communities will help us further elevate academic excellence and student achievement across the district."

— DR. WOLDE-AB ISAAC, CHANCELLOR

RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



www.ACCTSearches.org



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PROFESSIONAL BOARD STAFF NETWORK 2026 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

PRESIDENT

Reatha Bell
Executive Assistant, Board Services Office
Houston Community College, Texas
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VICE PRESIDENT

Andrea Wittig
Director, Office of the President, Government Relations,
Trustee Services, and Strategic Initiatives
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SECRETARY

Katie Riggs
Executive Assistant to the President/Board of Trustees
Clackamas Community College, Oregon

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

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Board Relations Administrator
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NORTHEAST REGION COORDINATOR

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SOUTHERN REGION MEMBER-AT-LARGE

Vacant

CENTRAL REGION MEMBER-AT-LARGE

Benita Duncan
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WESTERN REGION MEMBER-AT-LARGE

Denise Wilson
Board Liaison
Alamo Colleges, Texas
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PACIFIC REGION COORDINATOR AND MEMBER-AT-LARGE DESIGNEE

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SPECIAL ADVISOR TO THE PRESIDENT

Cynthia Gruskos
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connect.acct.org/spaces/8778457/feed

FIND US ON FACEBOOK

ACCT Professional Board Staff Network

PBSN WEBSITE

www.acct.org/membership/PBSN



Building Stronger Support for Stronger Leadership

BY REATHA BELL
PBSN PRESIDENT

AS WE begin 2026, I extend warm greetings on behalf of the Professional Board Staff Network (PBSN) Executive Committee to the dedicated professionals who support presidents, boards of trustees, chancellors, and administrators at their institutions.

PBSN is committed to strengthening the role of executive support professionals, who are essential to effective leadership in our colleges. As executive assistants and liaisons to presidents, boards of trustees, and chancellors, PBSN members are trusted partners who facilitate communication, coordination, and continuity. Their efforts enable leaders to advance higher education and carry out the Constitution and institutional policies.

This year, our focus is on building a stronger support staff to help leaders remain committed to the Constitution. We advance this goal through regional sessions and development sessions at the ACCT Annual Conference. These professional development opportunities enhance our members' ability to serve with excellence, integrity, and foresight.



Learn more at www.acct.org/membership/PBSN.



The PBSN Executive Committee provides strategic leadership for our network. We appreciate the dedication of our committee members:

- President: Reatha Bell
- Immediate Past President: Shelby Foster
- Vice President: Andrea Wittig
- Secretary: Kattie Riggs
- Communications Coordinator: Venisa Earhart
- Central Region Coordinator: Benita Duncan
- Northeast Region Coordinator: Evelyn Cordova
- Pacific Region Coordinator: Chelley Sadowsky
- Western Region Coordinator: Denise Wilson
- Senior Advisor to the President: Cynthia Gruskos

Their leadership ensures PBSN remains a vital, forward-thinking network that supports its members and the institutions they serve.

We look forward to gathering at the ACCT Annual Conference in Chicago in October 2026. This event offers PBSN members opportunities for professional growth, networking, and meaningful dialogue with higher education professionals nationwide. We encourage all members and supporters to attend and help shape the future of executive support in higher education.

Throughout 2026, let us work together to build stronger support systems that empower our leaders and uphold our institutional values. By doing so, we strengthen both our professional roles and the impact of leadership in our communities and colleges.

We look forward to a productive and inspiring year ahead.



PBSN Executive Committee. Not pictured: Cynthia Gruskos.

Investing in Governance: Why Professional Board Staff Matter

BY ANDREA WITTIG, PBSN VICE PRESIDENT

COMMUNITY COLLEGES ARE built on access, opportunity, and upward mobility. Every day, trustees and presidents make consequential decisions that shape the futures of millions of students. But behind every high-performing board and every student-centered institution is a group of professionals whose work is rarely visible yet absolutely essential.

We are the professional board staff.

We serve as the connective tissue between governance, the institution, and the communities our colleges serve. We translate vision into execution. We shepherd policy into practice. And we help build and sustain the systems, structures, and strategies that allow boards and CEOs to lead with clarity, confidence, and purpose.

In doing so, we help create the conditions for student success

Governance That Works for Students

Strong governance is built intentionally, thoughtfully, and strategically.

Professional board staff help ensure that boards are informed, prepared, compliant, and aligned. We manage complex governance calendars, public transparency requirements, accreditation cycles, executive searches, institutional partnerships, and strategic planning processes. We safeguard institutional integrity and support leadership continuity so institutions can move forward with confidence.

Most importantly, we help ensure that governance remains anchored to its ultimate purpose, student success.

Every agenda we build, every policy we shepherd, every board retreat we design, and every legislative briefing we prepare is guided by one central question: How does this move students forward?

It is this student-centered lens that shapes our work, and it is why professional board staff serve not only as operational leaders, but as the connectors, strategists, and trusted advisors who help translate governance into real-world impact.



The Connectors

Professional board staff operate at the intersection of governance, leadership, and the institution. In our day-to-day work, we connect trustees to presidents. We also connect governance to the operational life of the institution.

We help ensure that information flows clearly and consistently across the institution. We coordinate communication across departments. We support alignment between board priorities and institutional action.

In an era when community colleges are navigating increasing complexity and public expectations, connection is not optional. It is essential.

Professional board staff help ensure that boards are not operating in isolation, but as informed, engaged, and well-supported leaders of their institutions.

The Strategists

Student success requires more than good intentions. It requires strategy. And strategy requires disciplined governance.

Professional board staff support boards and CEOs as they move from aspiration to action. We help design and manage the governance processes that turn priorities into plans and plans into results.

Through agenda design, policy development, long-range planning, and progress reporting, professional board staff help boards govern with focus, discipline, and accountability. In doing so, we help institutions remain centered on what matters most, ensuring that students are supported from entry through completion and prepared for meaningful careers and continued education.

The Trusted Advisors

Community colleges serve generations of students. College leadership evolves, their strategies grow, and their communities change, but their mission endures.

Professional board staff serve as trusted advisors and partners in institutional continuity.

We preserve institutional knowledge. We carry forward commitments to students and communities. We support leadership transitions with stability, discretion, and trust. And we help boards navigate moments of uncertainty with perspective and care.

When new leaders arrive, we help them understand the culture and history they inherit. When boards face difficult decisions, we help to provide the context that allows them to lead with confidence. And when institutions confront change, we work alongside trustees and CEOs to help translate vision into action.

In a time of rapid transformation across higher education,

professional board staff provide the steady foundation that allows our institutions to move forward with clarity and momentum in service of students.

Why PBSN Matters

The Professional Board Staff Network is the premier national organization dedicated exclusively to advancing the profession of professional board staff in the community college sector.

PBSN provides a national forum where board professionals share best practices, exchange governance innovations, strengthen leadership capacity, and build trusted peer networks across states and systems. Through this work, PBSN elevates the profession and supports the development of the next generation of leaders.

As part of the Association of Community College Trustees, PBSN exists to support the professionals who support boards. All ACCT member institutions are welcome and encouraged to engage their professional board staff in PBSN and to take full advantage of its programs, convenings, and community.

A Respectful Request to Trustees and CEOs

Trustees and presidents carry the ultimate responsibility for the success of our institutions and the students we serve. Professional board staff are honored to support that leadership.

As governance continues to grow more complex, we respectfully encourage trustees and CEOs to view their professional board staff as strategic partners in institutional success and to support their continued professional development.

Each year, PBSN convenes at the ACCT Leadership Congress, bringing together professional board staff from across the country to learn, collaborate, and exchange best practices. These gatherings strengthen governance teams and equip board professionals to better serve their boards, presidents, and institutions.

In addition to the Leadership Congress, PBSN offers professional development opportunities, regional engagement, and year-round check-ins designed to support one another as we navigate an always changing higher education landscape.

Investments in professional board staff strengthen governance. They strengthen institutions. And ultimately, they strengthen student outcomes.

Strong governance begins with strong people. We are grateful for the opportunity to serve and for the continued partnership of trustees and presidents who share our commitment to student success.



Learn more at www.acct.org/membership/PBSN.

OCTOBER 2025 ELECTION RESULTS

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Chair

Carol Del Carlo

Nevada System of Higher Education, NV

Chair-Elect

Pretta VanDible Stallworth

Houston City College, TX

Vice Chair

Oscar Valladares

Rio Hondo College, CA

Secretary-Treasurer

Tim Hardy

Louisiana Community and Technical College System, LA

Immediate Past Chair

Richard Fukutaki

Bellevue College, WA

REGIONAL CHAIRS

Central Regional Chair

Amanda Howland

College of Lake County, IL

Northeast Regional Chair

Anthony Colón

Mohawk Valley Community College, NY

Pacific Regional Chair

Nan Gomez-Heitzeberg

Kern Community College District, CA

Southern Regional Chair

Yvonne Barnes

Trident Technical College, SC

Western Regional Chair

Carol Scott

Del Mar College, TX

REGIONAL DIRECTORS

(Three-year terms except where noted)

Central Region

Jermaine Reed

Metropolitan Community College, MO

1-Year Partial Term

Kathleen Bruinsma

Grand Rapids Community College, MI

Northeast Region

Deborah Briggs

SUNY Ulster, NY

Pacific Region

Nan Gomez-Heitzeberg

Kern Community College District, CA

Southern Region

Yvonne Barnes

Trident Technical College, SC

1-Year Partial Term

Terry W. Atchley

South Florida State College, FL

Western Region

Pat Wojcik

Northeast Community College, NE

DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE

(Three-year terms except where noted)

Manny Gonzalez

Austin Community College District, TX

Andra Hoffman

Los Angeles Community College District, CA

Robert Proctor

Lansing Community College, MI

1-Year Partial Term

Donald D. Dantzler, Jr.

Madison Area Technical College, WI

APPOINTED BOARD MEMBERS

(One-year terms except where noted)

Sharmila Swenson

Highline College, WA

Olivia Zepeda

Arizona Western College, AZ

RETIRING ACCT BOARD MEMBERS

Anay Abraham

Miami Dade College, FL

Steven Anderson

Northeast Community College, NE

Cristhian A. Canseco Juárez

Clark College, WA

Carla Hedtke

Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, WI

Sheila Ireland

Community College of Philadelphia, PA

Doug Mah

South Puget Sound Community College, WA

Susan Moore-Fontenot

Lee College, TX

Jay Nardini

Hawkeye Community College, IA

Diane Noriega

Mt. Hood Community College, OR

Arturo Reyes

Mott Community College, MI

Tina Royal

Davidson-Davie Community College, NC



ACCT DEADLINES

- **ACCT Awards Nominations**
June 22, 2026
- **Director-at-Large Candidate Nominations**
July 1, 2026
- **Amendments to ACCT Bylaws**
July 1, 2026
- **Submitting Resolutions**
July 1, 2026

Engage Your Board. Advance Your College.

ACCT Board Services provide opportunities to strengthen the unique role of board members and to develop an effective board.

Services Include

- Retreats
- Board self-assessment
- Presidential evaluations
- Succession planning
- Institutional leadership analysis
- Board policy review
- Mediation and conflict resolution

Call to learn more about ways to engage your board and make use of each trustee's skills and expertise.

Contact:

Colleen Allen
Director of Retreats and Evaluation Services
callen@acct.org

202-775-6490 | www.acct.org/governance-services



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ACCT LEADERSHIP CONGRESS

Driving Change, Leading with Care:
Transforming Institutions with Vision
and Compassion

October 21 - 24, 2026
Hyatt Regency Chicago



Register in February at Congress.ACCT.org