



BEST PRACTICES IN GUIDED PATHWAYS

Prepared by Hanover Research

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In the following report, Hanover Research presents the results of a literature review around best practices in guided pathways and a benchmarking analysis of related practices among community colleges.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on an analysis of practices among community colleges and secondary literature:

COMMUNITY COLLEGES SHOULD ENSURE THAT ALL STAKEHOLDERS ARE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS.

A recurring theme in the literature is the importance of a comprehensive approach towards implementing guided pathways. Feedback from early adopters indicates the importance of concerted efforts from all stakeholders at the institution, a process that may be started or deepened with conversations with staff, faculty, and students.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES SHOULD SEEK GRANTS FOR GUIDED PATHWAYS DEVELOPMENT.

A wide variety of state and national organizations are interested in guided pathways and related programming. Part of any institution's strategy should involve identifying the relevant local funding sources.

FAST FACTS



300+

Number of institutions nationwide that have adopted guided pathways



\$500k

Grant award that Washington community colleges have received from College Spark for the implementation of guided pathways

KEY FINDINGS

Over the past decade, guided pathways have become increasingly popular at community colleges nationwide.

Efforts by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the Community College Research Center (CCRC), in particular, have led to a fast expansion of guided pathways initiatives, promoting the shift from the so-called “cafeteria style” offerings to a more structured model. The overarching goals include improved academic performance and better retention and graduation rates.

Researchers and early adopters emphasize that implementing guided pathways is beneficial despite a lengthy implementation process.

A central recommendation from researchers and institutions is the adoption of a comprehensive approach toward implementing guided pathways. Collaboration across departments and offices, leadership from all organizational levels, and data-based decisions have been identified as key parameters for a successful transformation. Further, the AACC assumes an implementation process of five years. Despite start-up challenges, institutions have reported improved academic performance of students and better retention rates.

Meta-majors, program and transfer maps, pathway entries, and strong student support services are vital components of guided pathways.

Community colleges with guided pathways have restructured their curricula along meta-majors that include clear road maps. Aligning meta-majors, individual programs, and student advising with the local labor market, general education courses, and electives has typically been a long and complex, albeit integral, process for adopters of guided pathways. Additionally, strong relationships with the local school district and four-year institutions are important for transfer pathways.

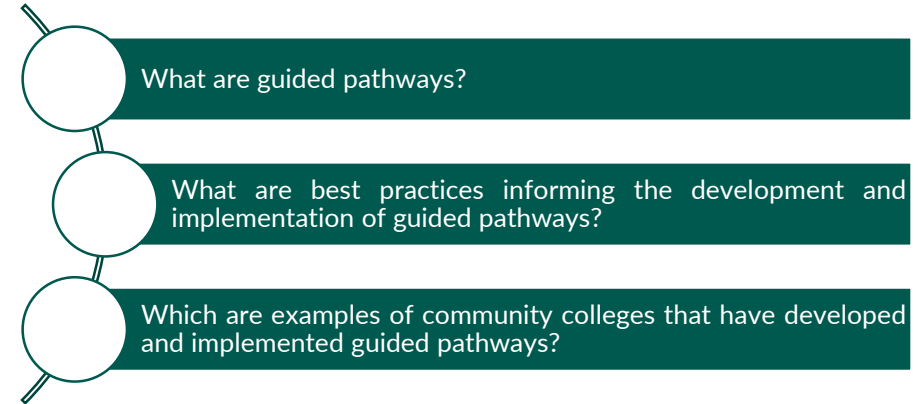
RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY

To assist community colleges in developing guided pathways, Hanover Research conducted a review of current trends, best practices, and exemplary case studies of community colleges. Examined publications include guidelines, studies, and articles published by:

- American Association of Community Colleges ([AACC](#))
- Community College Research Center ([CCRC](#))
- UW Community College Research Initiatives ([UW](#))
- Brookings Institute ([Brookings](#))
- National Center for Inquiry & Improvement ([NCII](#))
- [Inside Higher Ed](#) and [Education Dive](#)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS



BENCHMARKED COMMUNITY COLLEGES WITH GUIDED PATHWAYS

Institution	Location
Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College	<i>Asheville, NC</i>
Community College of Philadelphia	<i>Philadelphia, PA</i>
Everett Community College	<i>Everett, WA</i>
Linn-Benton Community College	<i>Albany, OR</i>
North Seattle College	<i>Seattle, WA</i>

Institution	Location
Skagit Valley College	<i>Mount Vernon, WA</i>
Skyline College	<i>San Bruno, CA</i>
South Puget Sound Community College	<i>Olympia, WA</i>
South Seattle College	<i>Seattle, WA</i>
Tacoma Community College	<i>Tacoma, WA</i>

TRENDS IN GUIDED PATHWAYS

GENERAL CONTEXT

Over the past decade, several community colleges have implemented guided pathways to help their students succeed.



In recent years, a range of researchers highlighted structural and motivational issues at community colleges, such as low retention and completion rates, as well as confusion and frustration among students ([CCRC](#); [Brookings](#); [Hechinger](#); [Chronicle](#)).



The so-called “cafeteria style” of community college has been identified as a major cause of challenges as it provided students with “too many choices” but “[too little guidance](#).”



To provide students with clear direction and help them succeed, the American Association of Community Colleges ([AACC](#)) launched [Guided Pathways](#) in 2014. The AACC works in collaboration with the Community College Research Center ([CCRC](#)), Jobs For The Future ([JFF](#)), and [other organizations](#).



In Washington, Guided Pathways initiatives are supported by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges ([SBCTC](#)) and College Spark ([Guided Pathways Initiative](#)).

BEST PRACTICES

Comprehensive reform, effective leadership, curricular alignment, and tailored advising constitute essential features of guided pathways.



Stakeholders emphasize the importance of a comprehensive approach for implementing guided pathways. Collaboration across departments and offices, as well as “leadership from all levels of the organization” are oft-cited requirements for a successful systemic change ([CCRC](#); [NCII](#)).



Other essential capacities for the implementation of guided pathways include the will and ability to use data and evidence, technological tools and infrastructure, strategically targeted professional development, appropriate policy conditions, and a continuing action research agenda ([AACC](#); [UW](#)).



AACC structures guided pathways into three phases: Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation ([AACC](#)). In 2017, the CCRC published a tool that allows institutions to self-assess how far along they are “toward adopting essential guided pathways practices at scale” ([CCRC](#)).



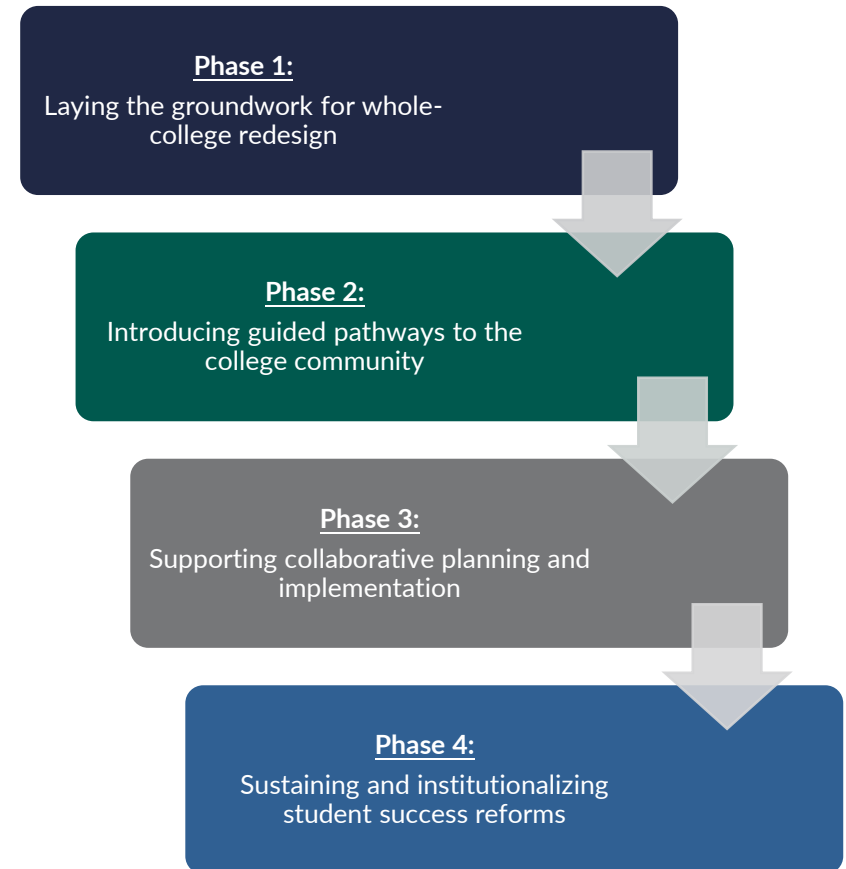
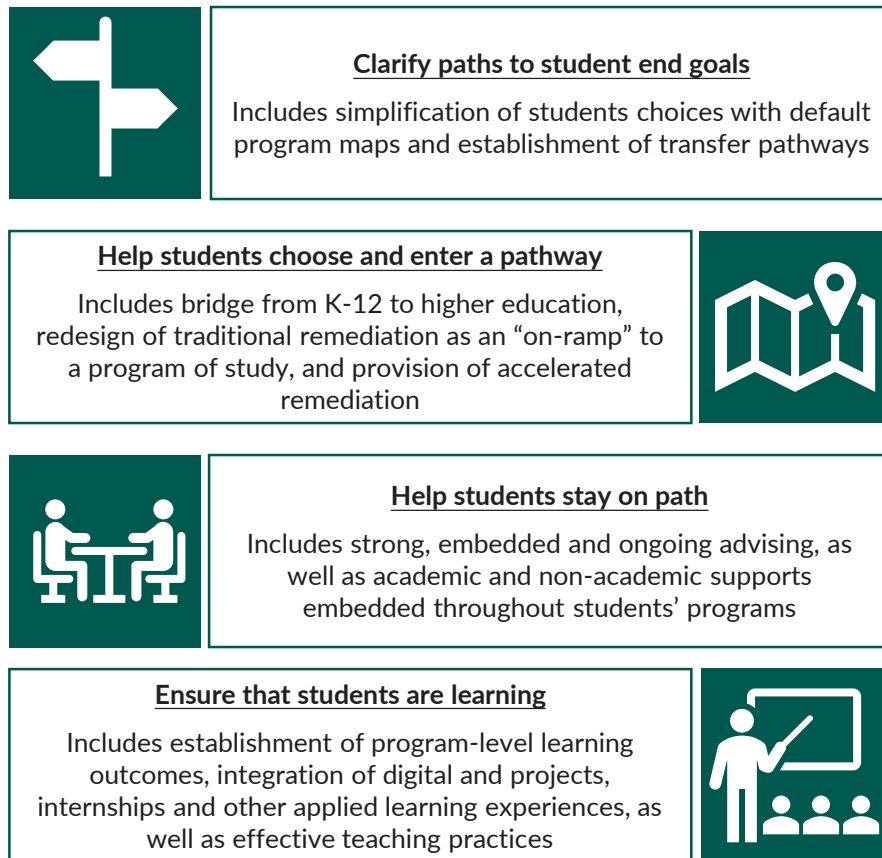
Colleges “need the best of both career pathways and guided pathways in order to truly increase economic advancement” ([JFF](#)). An integration of both approaches might be particularly beneficial within the field of career and technical education ([CCRC](#); [CLASP](#)).

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Central goals of guided pathways initiatives include facilitating students' orientation of available programs and career opportunities, improving academic performance and retention, and reducing time-to-degree completion.





The AACC Guided Pathways Model covers [four essential practices](#). Correspondingly, institutions have typically undergone [four phases of implementation](#).



NATIONAL TRENDS AND FEATURES

ADOPTION OF GUIDED PATHWAYS

Following the four practices suggested by the AACC, [over 300 institutions](#) have adopted the Guided Pathways model as of late 2019. A recent review indicates that institutions may “encounter stumbling blocks,” such as resistance from staff and faculty, resource allocations in support of the new model, and the need “to make constant tweaks to get the results they want” ([Education Dive](#)). Despite these challenges, early adopters have reported [positive outcomes](#). The figure below summarizes essential components of offerings and practices relevant to guided pathways, as well as notable examples.

Components	Recommended Strategies	Notable Examples
Program and transfer maps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement with all stakeholders to determine and design pathways • Meta-majors are commonly used to “provide structure and narrow choices to support student success” • Meta-majors “are aligned with local labor market” and each meta-major “includes a clear road map” • Alignment of general education courses and electives with each meta-major • Advising and student services align with a student’s meta-major 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skyline College has organized its programs around four meta-majors (e.g., Arts, Language & Communication). The individual program site lists a description, learning outcomes, requirements, etc. for each meta-major (e.g., A.A.) • Some large four-year institutions also offer meta-majors (ASU; GSU; NMSU) • Linn-Benton Community College provides user-friendly transfer guides to Oregon State and Western Oregon Universities • Everett Community College has reportedly customized transfer maps and offers joint advising with Western Washington University • Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (A-B Tech) has created College Transfer Success course • In May 2020, California Community Colleges proposed a new framework for building students’ transfer capacity
Pathway entries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen relationship with relevant school district to establish connection to high school students • Provide structured onboarding process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A-B Tech has created the JumpStart Pathways program that allows seniors at Buncombe County Schools to earn up to 21 college credits (Buncombe)
Stay on path 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure ongoing intrusive and intensive advising • Leverage technology (e.g., early alert system) • Accelerated Learning Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community College of Philadelphia reminds of the importance of aligning the classroom learning and experiences with coordinated support services so that students experience “college as a unified learning environment” • A-B Tech states that “quality advising is more important to the success of the project than developing structured curricula”
Learning outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure deep learning and academic progress • Track student learning outcomes • Work to improve teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tacoma Community College reportedly requires “learning outcomes to be determined not by individual programs but by faculty working together across broader fields, such as the social sciences, sciences, and humanities”

OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS

PROMISING RESULTS

Institutions that have been able to gather longitudinal data on the impact of their guided pathways programs report improved academic performance and retention rates.



In 2018, [South Puget Sound Community College](#) saw an improvement of 14 percentage points among students who completed a college-level math class and a 10 percentage point increase of students who completed a college-level English class.



In 2019, [Austin Community College](#) reported a “15.5 percentage point increase in overall retention from one term to the next.”



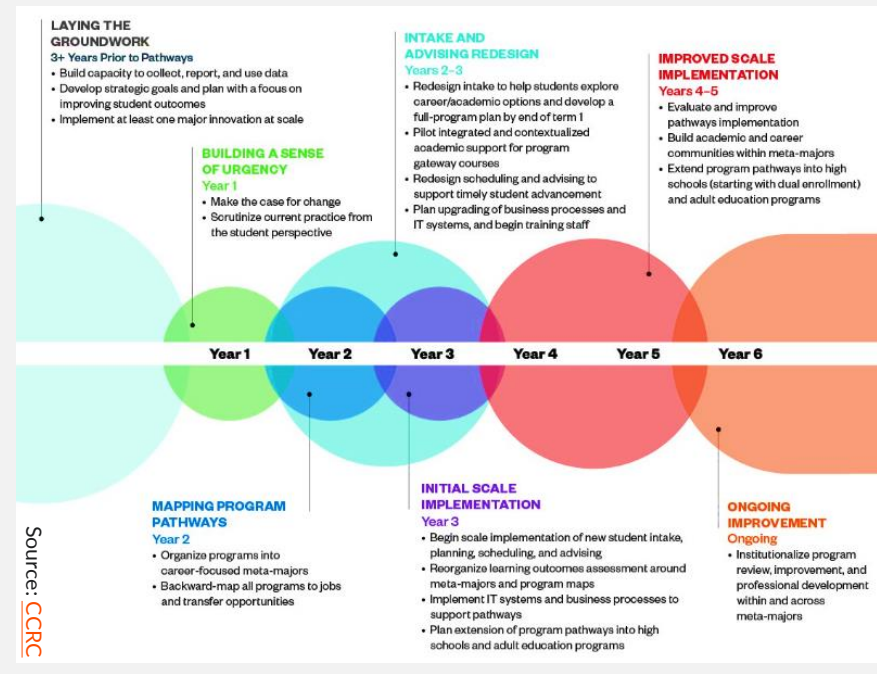
[Jackson College](#) saw the share of students who earned at least six college-level credits in their first term increase from 35 percent (2015) to 58 percent (2016). At [Lorain Community College](#), students took fewer credits that did not count toward their major.



A 2019 survey of U.S. students found that they “are [finding value](#) in the components of guided pathways.” Students stated that guided pathways [helped them](#) “select a major and its required courses.”

STRATEGIES FOR ONGOING PROGRESS

- ❖ Community colleges have implemented monitoring and data collection tools to keep track of students' progress and outcomes (e.g., [early momentum metrics](#); [progress tracking](#); [progress updates](#); [annual reports](#); [performance monitoring](#)). The CCRC will conclude a long-term study on the effects in [August 2020](#).
- ❖ California Community Colleges recommends [data coaching](#) to inform guided pathways development.
- ❖ A-B Tech and Austin Community College highlight the importance of [professional development opportunities](#) for staff and faculty.



CASE STUDY: GUIDED PATHWAYS IN WASHINGTON

CONTINUOUS EXPANSION

Washington was one of the first states in the nation to participate in large-scale implementation of guided pathways.

- ❖ In 2015, Pierce College District, Skagit Valley College, and South Seattle College became members of the state's first cohort in the [Guided Pathways Movement](#).
- ❖ In FY 2018 and FY 2019, the Washington legislature invested [\\$3 million](#) in support of Guided Pathways.
- ❖ The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) has recently called for a stronger alignment of Washington's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training ([I-BEST](#)) career pathway with guided pathways.
- ❖ The new [Washington College Grant](#) award (2019) has been lauded for making postsecondary education "more affordable for low- and middle-income students." The program reportedly also "invests in preparing Washington students for Washington jobs by [expanding the successful Guided Pathways program](#)."
- ❖ In February 2020, the Washington Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) stated that it seeks to [double community college completion rates](#) by 2030.

Participating Institutions in Washington

- Clark College
- Clover Park Technical College
- Everett Community College
- Lower Columbia Community College
- Peninsula College
- Pierce College District

- Renton Technical College
- Skagit Valley College
- South Puget Sound Community College
- South Seattle College
- Spokane Falls Community College
- Tacoma Community College

NOTABLE FEATURES



Most benchmarked WA community colleges have received a [\\$500,000 grant](#) from College Spark Washington. The award period is five years. In 2018, [South Seattle College](#) also received a five-year Title III award of \$2.1 million from the Department of Education in support of its guided pathways efforts.



[South Seattle College](#) and [South Puget Sound Community College](#) have expanded supported services through Completion Coaches and comprehensive tutoring services. South Puget has seen a 14 percent greater likelihood of students' continued education thanks to its *Enhanced Student Success* class.



[Equity](#) plays a central role in Washington's Guided Pathways. This goal has generally received greater attention than other goals across institutions and organizations ([Bragg](#); [OCCRL](#); [McClenney](#); [Skagit Valley CC](#)). Everett Community College, for example, developed a framework called [5 Dimensions of Equity](#).



North Seattle College has produced [videos](#) that inform about guided pathways, and South Puget Sound has embedded short video clips in available areas of study to address pathways (e.g., [Healthcare](#)).

BENCHMARKING SUMMARY

OVERVIEW OF SELECTED COMMUNITY COLLEGES WITH GUIDED PATHWAYS

Institution	Enrollment	Guided Pathways Program and Initiatives	Features	Notes
Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College Asheville, NC	6,892	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transitional Pathways Pathways Project for the Associate of Arts and Associate of Science Degrees JumpStart Pathways (dual enrollment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total of 39 pathways (e.g., General A.A.) ACA 122 College Transfer Success course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Division of Arts & Sciences launched Pathways Project in 2016 Emphasizes the importance of quality advising and flexibility Partnerships with Goodwill, Biltmore Company, and Biltmore Farms for Hospitality Pipeline
Community College of Philadelphia Philadelphia, PA	16,672	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guided Pathways Adoption of Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intake Process Curriculum Mapping Extensive Advising and Progress Tracking Micro-credentials Stackable credits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goals include reduction of time-to-degree and avoidance of excess credits First cohort member (2015) 1-year lead up before any changes Partners with Philadelphia public school system
Everett Community College Everett, WA	7,957	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pathways Program Maps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each pathway has team of academic advisors Curriculum Guide Master List IR data series Customized transfer maps/ joint advising with Western Washington University (WWU) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2019, College received \$500,000 grant from College Spark for implementation (over five years) Guided Pathways Scorecard dashboard (in Tableau, not available to public)
Linn-Benton Community College Albany, OR	5,559	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guided Pathways Seven Meta Majors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core Team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College adopted Achieving the Dream/Destination Graduation programs in 2012 and launched Guided Pathways in 2015 Monitoring includes annual report on scale of adoption (e.g., 2019) Meeting notes
North Seattle College Seattle, WA	5,929	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seattle Pathways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guiding team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produced videos and webinars Meeting minutes

Sources: Institutional Websites (see embedded hyperlinks) and [College Navigator](#)

BENCHMARKING SUMMARY

OVERVIEW OF SELECTED COMMUNITY COLLEGES WITH GUIDED PATHWAYS

Institution	Enrollment	Guided Pathways Program and Initiatives	Features	Notes
Skagit Valley College Mount Vernon, WA	5,159	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student Achievement Strategy Technical Education Pathways (NSF-ATE) in collaboration with University of Alabama and part of University of Washington's Community College Research Initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Areas of Study Pre-Engineering Transfer Degree 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First WA cohort member (2015) Equity in Access
Skyline College San Bruno, CA	9,014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive Redesign, including design principles: equity, inclusivity, student-centered, transparency & accountability, and flexibility Meta Majors and Guided Pathways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design team <p>Four meta majors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arts, Languages & Communication Business, Entrepreneurship & Management Science, Technology & Health Society & Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College began meta major work in 2016 to facilitate navigation and to organize degree and certificate programs in meaningful categories
South Puget Sound Community College Olympia, WA	4,872	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pathways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pathways are organized around ten broad disciplines Student support services Enhanced student success class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2016, College Spark Washington and Washington SBCTC awarded \$500,000 grant Embedded videos for each broad field (e.g., Healthcare)
South Seattle College Seattle, WA	6,177	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guided Pathways: Strong Start, Structured Programs, and Seamless Support Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guiding team Program Assignment by Area of Study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First WA cohort member (2015) Commitment to equity Progress Updates In 2018, College received five-year \$2.1 million Title III award from Department of Education
Tacoma Community College Tacoma, WA	6,242	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieving the Dream / Pathways to Completion framework Distinction Pathways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distinction pathways available for four tracks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2018, College received \$500,000 grant from College Spark Appointment of President Harrell II

Sources: Institutional Websites (see embedded hyperlinks) and [College Navigator](#)

