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Your Community College

Forging partnerships that work | Kevin G. Walthers

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Kevin Walthers
Contributed

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Never underestimate the power of partnerships.

For more than a decade, Allan Hancock College has fostered relationships to serve students and businesses in northern Santa Barbara County. These partnerships are the foundation for providing every opportunity for local students to continue their higher education close to home.

Our high school partners are among our closest. When the Santa Maria High School District built the remarkable Mark Richardson Career Technical Education Center, the district invited Hancock to collaborate in building career pathways for students.

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Together, Hancock's faculty — alongside high school teachers — are providing students with college credit in a variety of disciplines, including computer networking, culinary arts, and agriculture.

Another example is when state funding for Santa Ynez Valley High School's career technical programs was eliminated. In response, county Superintendent Susan Salcido reached out to Hancock, and our team immediately stepped in to create concurrent enrollment programs that addressed the impacted areas.

Today, Hancock offers 27 concurrent enrollment classes at SYVHS, helping the school maintain 46 classes in career education.

Last year, in partnership with Orcutt Academy, we launched a unique cohort program that provides a pathway to an associate's degree. This program allows a cohort of students starting in the ninth grade to simultaneously graduate from high school with a high school diploma and an associate of arts degree from Hancock.

Similar programs are now under development for the Lompoc, Santa Maria, and Santa Ynez districts.

Our partnerships don't stop with high schools. Last year Hancock and Cuesta College unveiled UnitED Central Coast, a collaboration focused on serving local students and businesses.

UnitED Central Coast marks a new way of addressing needs in our region — one that prioritizes identifying who is best able to serve the community and deprioritizes who gets credit.

This year, Santa Barbara City College is joining us to build a regional education model that transcends institutional boundaries.

Results from our college-level partnerships are paying dividends already. Leaders at Marian Regional Medical Center approached Hancock to develop a radiography program to address critical staffing shortages.

After assessing our ability to embark on a multi-year accreditation process that would require a substantial capital investment, we concluded that we might not be the best fit to lead this program.

Instead, we reached out to Santa Barbara City College, which already operates a highly regarded radiology program. There was only one problem: Santa Barbara is too far for most of our students to commute for the program.

For Hancock, this opportunity was not a matter of increasing our enrollment. We simply wanted a solution to a community need. City College responded positively to our request for a partnership, and over the course of a few meetings, a solution was born: SBCC would offer a radiology cohort at Allan Hancock College.

Starting this semester, Hancock students can register for the pre-radiography certificate that leads to direct placement into the SBCC radiography program.

This collaboration will not only prepare students for well-paying, in-demand jobs, but also provide local hospitals and clinics with the skilled professionals they need.

Our partnership with Cuesta continues to thrive as well. Hancock's Public Safety Training Complex in Lompoc offers best-in-class training for police officers, fire fighters, and paramedics/EMTs.

Over the years, AHC has provided training for the Atascadero State Hospital (an entity within Cuesta's service region). Together, we are now exploring cross-county career education pathways, connecting students at the Mark Richardson Center to both Hancock and Cuesta.

To create transformational, systemic change, partnerships must operate in an environment of trust and shared vision. Hancock's dedication to change the odds for our community is shared by our local K-12 partners and our friends at Cuesta and Santa Barbara City colleges.

It's amazing what you can do for your neighbors when you focus on the needs and not who is getting credit.

Kevin G. Walthers, Ph.D., is the superintendent/president of Allan Hancock College.

Tags

