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Your Community College

The economic engine in your own back yard | Kevin G. Walthers

Aug 2, 2025



Kevin Walthers
Contributed

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You already know that Allan Hancock College is dedicated to changing the odds for our students, but we are equally committed to serving as a catalyst for regional economic growth.

As debates about the value of higher education continue across the country, the college in your own backyard stands as a powerful example of how community colleges create both personal opportunity and public return on investment.

Let's start with our youngest students — Gen Z. Each year, hundreds of local high schoolers earn college credit toward a Hancock degree, often right on their high school campus during the regular bell schedule.

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Once they arrive at Hancock, they benefit from the Hancock Promise — our community's commitment to providing regional high school graduates with two years of free tuition.

The result?

Enrollment of local students is up, and even more significantly, the number of students earning degrees has reached record levels.

The value of a Hancock education extends far beyond the classroom. Our students see an average return on their educational investment of 19 percent. Those who complete associate degrees or career technical education certificates experience significant wage increases that often surpass their pre-college earnings.

For many, especially first-generation college students and working adults, Hancock opens the door to economic mobility and long-term stability for their families.

Our graduates also help strengthen the fabric of our community. Hancock is the leading source of training nurses and medical professionals who support our local health care system.

Our Public Safety Training Complex alumni earn a livable wage while protecting and caring for their neighbors in their roles as firefighters, police officers, sheriff's deputies, and paramedics.

Local employers benefit from Hancock's programs, too. Working closely with local businesses, we ensure our programs align with the skills today's employers need most.

Welders, machinists, and auto technicians trained at Hancock keep industries running throughout the region. At the same time, engineers, teachers, and entrepreneurs who got their start here are driving innovation and filling workforce gaps.

Zooming out, the economic impact of Allan Hancock College is undeniable. Each year, Hancock injects more than half a billion dollars into our region and supports over 6,400 local jobs.

For every dollar invested in the college, nearly nine dollars return to the community in the form of increased employment and economic activity.

So, what's next?

For decades, our community has faced a glaring gap in access to bachelor's degrees. Hancock is now helping to close that gap.

New partnerships with Cal Poly and Cal State Channel Islands are bringing university degrees directly to our Santa Maria campus. This fall, Cal Poly welcomes its second cohort of sociology majors, while the first cohort prepares to complete their degree by spring 2026.

Next fall, we'll launch a new Cal Poly business degree cohort, and CSUCI will offer a Bachelor of Science in nursing. By 2030, at least five bachelor's degree programs will be available at Hancock, serving approximately 400 students from the region.

These new opportunities will drive economic growth and expand access to life-changing education. As we look to the future, we know that supporting tomorrow's students will require thoughtful planning and a shared vision.

Just as previous generations came together to invest in Hancock, we're excited to begin conversations with our community about how we can continue building a college that grows with — and for — the people it serves.

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

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