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Your Community College

The trades are college, and college includes the trades | Kevin G. Walthers

Dec 13, 2025



Kevin Walthers  
Contributed

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Last week, I wrote a column here in the Santa Maria Times about the value of going to college. The response was passionate, and many readers reminded me that there's nothing wrong with the trades.

I agree completely. In fact, that was the point of last week's column. I wrote, "There's more to college than a bachelor's degree. Nursing is college. Welding is college. Public safety is college. Machining is college. These are valuable programs that lead to careers that can provide for a family in our region and across California, and they are still college."

Perhaps I was a little too subtle. So let me be clear: the core of the American community college is educating students for careers in the trades.

ADVERTISING



Over the past two weeks, Allan Hancock College has hosted graduation ceremonies for law enforcement officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, and nurses.

More than 200 new public safety professionals are now prepared for careers that will support families on the Central Coast.

Beyond first responder training, our welding program offers state-of-the-art instruction for students heading into the workforce and apprenticeships. Machinists across the region got their start in our classrooms. Local auto repair shops regularly contact our faculty so they can hire Hancock graduates.

All these programs are “the trades” — those hands-on careers that require specialized knowledge, skills and, therefore, training. Today, this training is often called career education.

Career education is provided by colleges like Hancock, which means that careers in the trades often require benefit of a college education.

Imagine leaving high school and stepping into a free training program that prepares you for a job paying \$60,000 a year or more. Our welding program does exactly that.

Similar earnings are possible in machining, accounting, graphic design and publishing, to name only a few — all of which are career education programs.

You may have noticed that I said, “free training program”. Hancock offers certificates and degrees in the trades at no cost to recent high school graduates through the Hancock Promise.

Every local student, regardless of their goals, is eligible to receive free tuition for two years starting the fall after they graduate from high school.

This opportunity is possible because of generous community donors who believe in training students for the trades and supporting those who plan to transfer to a university.

The Allan Hancock College Foundation pledges “College for All”, and the Promise delivers on that pledge.

We take our career education mission seriously. Over the past six years we have invested more than \$12 million into strengthening the programs we offer. This is above and beyond our annual investment in faculty and staff who teach the classes.

More than 45 percent of Hancock's annual enrollment comes from career education programs.

Last year, we awarded more than 900 degrees and certificates, with many students earning multiple credentials. And we are not just educating adults.

More than 2,800 high school students across the region are concurrently enrolled in our career education programs offered on their campuses.

College is essential because the trades are essential. With the support of the Hancock Foundation, we're moving toward ensuring college for all.

The results speak clearly.

Nearly 1,000 students a year earn credentials that are valued in the workforce.

More than 500 students transfer and enroll in four-year universities each year.

Students who graduate locally and complete two years at Hancock are more than twice as likely to enroll in a four-year university as their high school peers.

Whether you aim to be a welder, nurse, or machinist, one thing is true: you need college to enter a trade.

Allan Hancock College is proud to offer high-quality education at an affordable price, creating a return on investment that benefits students and strengthens our region. That is how your community college is Changing the Odds.

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

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