

Your Community College

AHC rings in an optimistic new year | Kevin G. Walthers

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Kevin Walthers
Contributed

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As we welcome a new year, it is a good time to pause and reflect on what made this year so meaningful for Allan Hancock College. Simply put, 2025 was an exceptional year for your community college, and it happened for one clear reason: our community continues to believe in our students.

Allan Hancock College exists to change the odds, and this year we made measurable progress toward that promise. Enrollment among Hancock Promise students continued at pre-pandemic levels, reinforcing what we already know: when cost barriers are removed, students step forward.

The Hancock Promise is a public-private partnership with our community that provides recent high school graduates with up to two years of free tuition, provided they attend full time.

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Students may pursue a transfer pathway or enter career education programs that lead directly to local jobs including welding, automotive technology, machining, fire service, and health care.

Just as important, we are seeing record levels of student completion. More students than ever are earning certificates and degrees, marking the first major milestone in their educational journeys.

For many Promise students, this means two years of college without the heavy financial burden often associated with higher education. It is a powerful reminder of what happens when a community invests in its young people.

Of course, tuition is only one part of the cost of attending college: housing, transportation, books, and basic needs all matter.

Once again, our community stepped up in remarkable ways.

In May, the Allan Hancock College Foundation awarded more than \$605,000 in scholarships to over 400 students, the largest total in the Foundation's history.

These scholarships helped students stay enrolled and focused on their goals.

Community partnerships also played a critical role. Support from the Cloverlane Foundation helped cover the cost of textbooks and supplies for students in our nursing and fire programs.

We were also proud to welcome a new partner to our Fire Academy: the All Within My Hands Foundation, funded by the band Metallica, which provided a \$75,000 grant to support future first responders.

These partnerships reflect a shared belief in education, workforce preparation, and public service.

Looking ahead, 2026 will bring milestones that have been years in the making.

This June, the first cohort of local students will graduate from Cal Poly with sociology degrees completed entirely on our Santa Maria campus. Soon after, students will begin working toward Cal Poly business administration degrees in the same way.

These opportunities allow students to earn high-quality university degrees without leaving home, strengthening families and our regional workforce.

Collaboration continues to shape our future. We are partnering with Santa Barbara City College, Cuesta College, and Cal State Channel Islands to expand educational opportunities without duplicating programs.

Santa Barbara City College is extending its radiologic technology program to Santa Maria and Lompoc, helping meet urgent local health care needs.

Cuesta College and Hancock are sharing resources to expand offerings in local high schools across county lines. These efforts are guided by a simple principle: when institutions work together, students benefit.

Health care education remains central to our mission. This fall will mark the first cohort of students pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Nursing through CSU Channel Islands on the Hancock campus.

For working nurses, many of whom are balancing careers and families, the ability to earn a BSN locally is a meaningful opportunity to advance without putting life on hold.

As residents of northern Santa Barbara County, we are seeing the results of thoughtful planning and collaboration. We are building a higher education ecosystem shaped by local needs, designed to support local students, and focused on long-term community strength.

In the year ahead, we will begin sharing a vision for a future University Center at Hancock that will expand opportunities while keeping students and community priorities front and center.

The year ahead holds great promise for Allan Hancock College and for the communities we serve.

I look forward to sharing more stories of student success and the dedication of our faculty and staff.

On behalf of all of us at Allan Hancock College, I wish you a happy and hopeful new year.

Kevin G. Walthers is superintendent and president of Allan Hancock College.

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