

**NC STATE UNIVERSITY**

College of Education  
Belk Center for Community College  
Leadership and Research

## **COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN ACTION:**

Advancing Equity and Enhancing  
Economic Mobility Using Local  
Collective Impact Strategies

**Dr. Mike Flores**

Chancellor of the  
Alamo Colleges District  
2022 Dallas Herring Lecture  
November 8, 2022

**2022 DALLAS HERRING LECTURE**

Dear Colleagues,

The Dallas Herring Lecture is one of my favorite events of the year. I'm consistently inspired by the messages delivered by our respondents year after year, and our 2022 lecture from Dr. Mike Flores was certainly no exception. With a record number of attendees joining us in person and online, Dr. Flores, chancellor of the Alamo Colleges District, delivered an impassioned call to understand the students we serve and meet them where they are.

His words echoed those of our annual lecture's namesake, Dr. Dallas Herring. Recognizing the many barriers and limitations standing in the way of this vision of education for all, Herring remarked, "The goal of the community college system must be as comprehensive as the needs of our students are. If this is not understood, then it is our duty to make it clear, so that it will be understood. We must support policies which will open all of these doors to all of the people who can walk through them."

Dr. Flores opened his lecture stating that to advance equity and enhance economic mobility, we must first understand and embrace the communities we serve. I heard from numerous attendees that Dr. Flores' lecture reminded them of community colleges' critical role in transforming the lives and outcomes of students, families and communities – and inspired them to recommit to the call of meeting students where they are and walking alongside them on their educational journey.

His words inspired our team at the Belk Center, too. Dr. Flores spotlighted the importance of utilizing data to make informed decisions. The Belk Center is committed to engaging in practical research that supports, informs and furthers the work of creating more equitable outcomes for community college students.

However, while data is critical, we can never let the "big picture" view prevent us from listening to individual stories. Dr. Flores shared the stories of a handful of Alamo Colleges' students that spotlighted the power education can have on eliminating generational poverty.



Those stories were echoed by Dr. Janet Spriggs, president of Forsyth Technical Community College (FTCC), who delivered the lecture response. Beyond sharing stories of FTCC students, she also shared her own powerful personal experience as a low-income, first-generation college student. You can watch her response here (begins at the 1:01:25 mark).

I'm pleased to share this resource with you to further the work you are doing at your own institutions. You're also welcome to watch the recorded event, utilize our DHL 2022 Discussion Guide, or listen to previous lectures online. I hope Dr. Flores' words, shared in its entirety in this booklet, will inspire you as well.

Lastly, I'd like to thank my colleagues at the Belk Center who worked tirelessly to ensure our 2022 Dallas Herring Lecture was a success – Monique N. Colclough, Nohemi Ramirez and Jane Walters. A special thanks also goes to the NC State College of Education for supporting the Dallas Herring Lecture, and our friends and partners at the John M. Belk Endowment.

Cordially,

**Audrey J. "A.J." Jaeger, Ph.D.**

W. Dallas Herring Professor, NC State College of Education Executive Director, Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research



## ABOUT DR. MIKE FLORES

Mike Flores is the ninth appointed and first Hispanic chancellor of the Alamo Colleges District. He assumed the role on October 1, 2018 after more than 20 years of service to the district.

Through his leadership, the Alamo Colleges District launched AlamoPROMISE, a tuition-free college program for graduating high school students in Bexar County. He also supported the launch of Student Advocacy Centers at each of the district's five colleges and reduced tuition for students enrolled fully online. In his first year as chancellor, Flores led the Alamo Colleges District and its five colleges to be awarded the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.

Other achievements during Flores' tenure include: Palo Alto College named Rising Star by the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence (2019); Ellucian Impact Award (2020); San Antonio College named winner of the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence (2021); and the American Association of Community Colleges Award of Excellence for Student Success (2022).

Flores is a former coach for Achieving the Dream, a fellow for the American Council on Education, Pahara Aspen Institute, and the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities.

He is also the recipient of the Ohtli Award – one of the most prestigious awards given by the Mexican government. He serves as a board member for the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, UP Partnership, United Way San Antonio, Achieving the Dream, College Board's Community College Advisory Panel, and the World Affairs Council.

Flores holds a Ph.D. in Educational Administration from the University of Texas at Austin, a master's in political science from Illinois State University and a bachelor's in political science from the University of Texas at San Antonio. He lives in central San Antonio with his wife and two daughters.



## THE 2022 DALLAS HERRING LECTURE:

### Community Colleges In Action: Advancing Equity and Enhancing Economic Mobility Using Local Collective Impact Strategies

Good afternoon/Buenas Tardes – I am humbled to be amongst so many community college leaders from the great state of North Carolina and across the country at this year's W. Dallas Herring Lecture. I would like to thank the team at NC State's College of Education, the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research and the many event organizers who annually make this opportunity for fellowship and leadership development possible.

It goes without saying, to be a part of the legacy of this series is extraordinary, especially considering the series' namesake. We are all advocates for educational equity and access for all. In researching more about the life of Mr. Herring, it is clear that he not only believed in the principles of equity and inclusion but he put words to action. Known as the "Father of the North Carolina Community College System," Mr. Herring was a tireless champion of the power of education.

It is fitting that today's conversation focuses on local collective impact strategies and their ability to advance equity and economic mobility. As a public servant, Mr. Herring understood the impact local decision makers can have on the trajectory of a community. Today, I will highlight in my remarks the collective impact work undertaken not only by our college district, but by our neighbors aimed at ending generational poverty in our region.

In researching Mr. Herring's background, I found several remarks to be inspiring; however, it was Mr. Herring's words spoken to the North Carolina Legislature in 1966 that struck a chord with me. It is worth hearing this clarion call again before we embark on our conversation today:

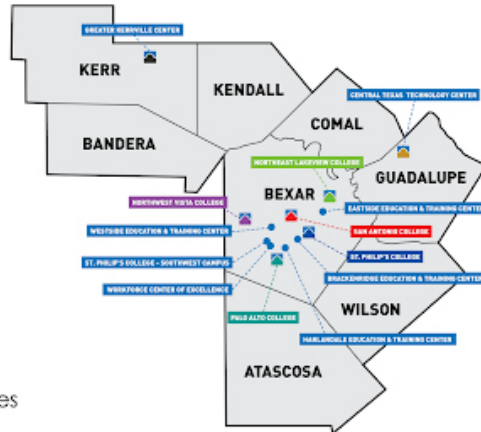




Utilizing a framework focused on student success and ensuring the elevation of our diverse communities, we as community colleges must continue to meet our students where they are and take them to the next step on their educational journey.

## The Alamo Colleges District Family

- 5 Colleges
  - San Antonio College
  - St. Philip's College
  - Palo Alto College
  - Northwest Vista College
  - Northeast Lakeview College
- 8 Regional & Neighborhood Centers
  - 2 NEW sites coming
- 42 High School Program Sites



## Understanding Inequality in Education Starts with Embracing the Students We Serve

To understand how we can advance equity and enhance economic mobility begins with understanding and embracing the communities we serve.

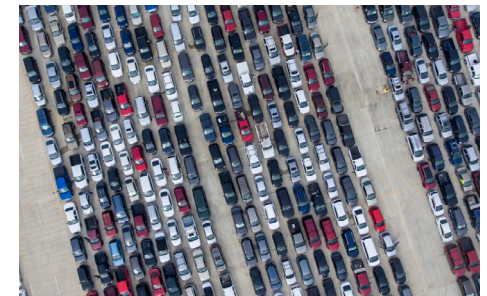
Before I jump into our discussion, I did want to take a moment to give a thirty-second run down of where I come from and who we serve at the Alamo Colleges District. The Alamo Colleges District comprises five individually accredited colleges, eight education and training centers including two under construction. We serve a vast region encompassing eight counties that includes one urban county (Bexar) with seven surrounding counties that are both suburban and rural. Annually, we have approximately 100,000 students that are 80% students of color, 68.4% are attending part-time and 70% rely on some type of financial aid. Our community is diverse and growing every day.

With enrollment declines and the question of whether a college degree is worth it, some would opine that community colleges are in competition with other institutions of higher learning, but that could not be further from the truth. The reality is we are all in the collective fight against poverty. And that is why this moment, this debate on the value of higher learning is one we can not shy away from. We must lean in and meet the challenge and collectively work together to bring with us those communities who have felt left behind.

An estimated 70% of jobs will require some type of post-secondary degree by 2030, meaning that the earning potential is greater for those with a degree versus those without. The differential in lifetime earnings between individuals with a high school degree and those with some college or an associate's degree is nearly \$423,000.<sup>1</sup> But the story doesn't end there.

We know that individuals with some type of postsecondary degree will have a far greater chance of overcoming financial challenges than individuals with no high school or college degree. In a recent report published by the U.S. Census Bureau, they examined the dynamics of poverty between 2017 and 2019. The data showed that the largest differences in poverty were among those with different levels of education. They concluded based on the data, "adults aged 25 and older, those with no high school diploma were over three times more likely than those with a bachelor's degree to experience episodic poverty and 19 times more likely to experience chronic poverty."<sup>2</sup> The continued effects of the pandemic and recent spike in inflationary costs have only compounded the struggle for our communities.

One image stands out amongst the hundreds we saw during the pandemic. It was early in the pandemic and there it was an aerial view of thousands of cars lined up, bumper-to-bumper, in line for a food giveaway from the San Antonio Food Bank. The image was jarring. But it was also a lightning bolt for action.



William Luther/The San Antonio Press on April 12, 2020.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/12/us/coronavirus-long-lines-america.html>

As a community, we quickly went into action mode by doing what San Antonio does best – by assisting in any form. Donating time, energy, and money to the San Antonio Food Bank to lift each other up.

During that same time at the Alamo Colleges, we enhanced our advocacy centers across our district to assist our students and their families. This enhanced work included case managing approximately 50,000 students who received \$82 million in federal emergency aid as part of the three Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) programs distributed by the federal government.

As a city and as a district we witnessed great resilience and persistence in our community. It is what our city is known for.

<sup>1</sup> Edelson, David. "How Does a College Degree Improve Graduates' Employment and Earnings Potential?" *Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities*, 6 Sept. 2022, <https://www.aplu.org/our-work/4-policy-and-advocacy/publicvalues/employment-earnings/>

<sup>2</sup> Warren, L., & Tettenhorst, A. (2022, September). *Poverty dynamics: 2017-2019 - Census.gov*. Poverty Dynamics: 2017–2019. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2022/demo/p70br-179.pdf>

We are still working through the same issues that community leaders are working through across the country as COVID becomes endemic – working to increase graduation rates, retaining students and enrolling students.

For the past couple of years, we have all seen the stories about enrollment plunges.

**According to a report from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, while all institutional sectors experienced varying degrees of enrollment declines, the public sector (two- and four-year colleges combined), which enrolled 71% of all students this spring, suffered the steepest drop, over 604,000 students. In particular, community colleges fell by 7.8% representing more than half of the total postsecondary enrollment losses this spring.**

Across the country, rural serving institutions – including 79% of community colleges that identify as RSIs here in North Carolina – played a vital role in supporting educational opportunity, social development and well-being of rural communities.

A report published earlier this year by the Alliance for Research on Regional Colleges highlighting the importance of rural serving institutions was underscored through the COVID-19 pandemic, when these institutions worked to continue educating students remotely in spite of inequality in broadband internet access.<sup>3</sup>

In North Carolina, community college enrollment dropped 11% from fall 2019 to fall 2020.<sup>4</sup> While this past fall saw a small uptick in enrollment, systemwide it has not recovered to pre-pandemic enrollment levels.

Yes, the pandemic also hit cities with high poverty rates hard – but there were signs of upward movement in San Antonio.

From May 2021 to May 2022, new jobs in the San Antonio region grew by 4.6% outpacing many other U.S. cities for job expansion.<sup>5</sup>

**We must realize our students are juggling studies and home responsibilities with many also serving as caregivers to children or other family members. Approximately one out of every five of our student population are parents. These students are facing distinct challenges that include high rates of economic insecurity, caregiving demands – and some even have multiple jobs – that may affect their educational outcomes.**

3 Koricich, A., Sansone, V. A., Fryar, A. H., Orphan, C. M., & McClure, K. R. (2022, January). *Introducing Our Nation's Rural-Serving Postsecondary Institutions Moving Toward Greater Visibility and Appreciation*. ARRC | Project - Introducing Our Nation's Rural-Serving Postsecondary Institutions. Retrieved from <https://www.regionalcolleges.org/project/ruralserving>

4 *Trends in Instructional FTE by Academic Level Over Time (Reporting Years)*, NC Community Colleges, 2022, [www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/analytics/dashboards/total-instructional-activity-fte](https://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/analytics/dashboards/total-instructional-activity-fte)

5 Williams, K. (2022, July 15). *As economic concerns mount, here's how the job market is faring in San Antonio*. Retrieved from [www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/analytics/dashboards/total-instructional-activity-fte](https://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/analytics/dashboards/total-instructional-activity-fte)

Our non-traditional students are now today's college student.

**We have heard from parents who say going back to school after becoming a parent is a completely different ball game, with little to no support on how to handle everything.**

We know many San Antonio families struggle just to pay bills and make ends meet. That is their reality. But it is our reality too as their partner in their postsecondary journey.

So many students need that extra hand to achieve their mission. This was the case for one of our recent graduates, Markisha Beachman, who sought a second chance at wanting to better herself. We're proud that Markisha just accepted a full-time position with a local insurance company.

Markisha was a work-study at our student advocacy center at San Antonio College and said she was most proud of having a goal in mind, successfully planning and staying dedicated to crossing the finish line. She says she has achieved more than she could ever have dreamed.

Markisha is like many of our students – a single mom of two and what we think and refer to as a non-traditional student. Because of her work-study position, and the resources provided to her, she is now leading a better life for her and her family.

Our non-traditional students are now today's college student. They are who the Alamo Colleges District as well as who most of your colleges serve every day and acknowledging this helps us better support our students and our community.

It is my hope that Markisha's story carries over to each and every one of our students.

Markisha, and so many students like her, is why the Alamo Colleges will always focus on student success and access, putting students first and empowering them to achieve their postsecondary goals. She is why we will continue to build support systems that serve our vast and diverse student population.

## Embracing the Power of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) as Economic Drivers

The face of America is changing. After the 2020 U.S. Census, the data showed that our country has increased in ethnic and racial diversity. Now more than 40% of the U.S. population identifies with one or more racial and ethnic groups.<sup>6</sup>

6 Frey, W. H. (2021, August 13). *New 2020 census results show increased diversity countering decade-long declines in America's white and youth populations*. Brookings. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/new-2020-census-results-show-increased-diversity-countering-decade-long-declines-in-americas-white-and-youth-populations/>

In the last two decades, our country has seen a seismic shift in the makeup of our population. The white population has declined by close to 58% in the last two decades while the Latino or Hispanic population has increased by almost 19%. What does that mean in raw numbers? This equates to a U.S. Hispanic or Latino population of almost 62.5 million up from 50.5 million in 2010.<sup>7</sup>

Also, interesting to note from the data is that not only was the majority of population growth in the last decade attributed to Hispanic or Latinos but it was due to newborns. Fifty-two percent (12.05 million) of the population growth between 2010 and 2020 is attributed to the rise in Hispanic or Latino births in the U.S. On average there were 1 million Hispanic babies born each year between 2010 and 2020 while roughly 350,000 Hispanic immigrants arrived in the U.S.<sup>8</sup> This rise in new births versus immigration bucks trends from prior decades and provides an opportunity for our institutions of higher learning.

No surprise to anyone, the largest share of Hispanic or Latino population growth has been and continues to be in California and Texas. In fact, this last decade saw the Hispanic or Latino population moved to 40% (11.9 million) of the population in Texas making it the largest racial or ethnic group according to the 2021 American Community Survey.<sup>9</sup>

Now, 13 states can say they have Hispanic or Latino populations of more than one million including the state of North Carolina. In the last decade, North Carolina saw nearly 320,000 Hispanic or Latino individuals added to the state, the largest numeric increase in the state by any racial or ethnic group. Not dissimilar from what we saw in Texas, North Carolina's Hispanic or Latino population growth was predominately in urban and suburban counties and was composed of U.S. born individuals.<sup>10</sup>

7 Krogstad, J. M., Passel, J. S., & Noe-Bustamante, L. (2022, September 23). *Key facts about U.S. Latinos for National Hispanic Heritage month*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/09/23/key-facts-about-u-s-latinos-for-national-hispanic-heritage-month/>

8 Krogstad, J. M., Passel, J. S., & Noe-Bustamante, L. (2022, September 23). *Key facts about U.S. Latinos for National Hispanic Heritage month*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/09/23/key-facts-about-u-s-latinos-for-national-hispanic-heritage-month/>

9 Krogstad, J. M., Passel, J. S., & Noe-Bustamante, L. (2022, September 23). *Key facts about U.S. Latinos for National Hispanic Heritage month*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/09/23/key-facts-about-u-s-latinos-for-national-hispanic-heritage-month/>

10 Tippett, R. (2021, October 21). *North Carolina's Hispanic Community: 2021 Snapshot*. Carolina Demography. Retrieved from <https://www.ncdemography.org/2021/10/18/north-carolinas-hispanic-community-2021-snapshot/>

A recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education highlighted the challenge colleges face with our Hispanic or Latino students. Despite enrollment gains from this population prior to the pandemic, we saw declines at all levels of higher education. With more than half of Hispanic or Latinos enrolling in community colleges nationwide, there is urgency to act.

The practices and opportunities gained as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) provide a roadmap for what can be done to help bring back our Hispanic or Latino students and help them persist through our colleges.

Defined by the Higher Education Opportunity Act, Title V, 2008, HSIs are “accredited, degree-granting, public or private nonprofit institutions of higher education with 25% or more total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrollment, which also have an enrollment of low-income students and low average educational and general expenditures per FTE student, compared to similar institutions.”

In academic year 2020-2021, 559 institutions met the federal criterion for HSIs with enrollment of 2.2 million undergraduate Hispanic students. Two-Hundred and Twenty-Six of the institutions making up the HSIs in the U.S. today are public two-year colleges.<sup>11</sup> The Hispanic or Latino population in the U.S. is expected to increase by 25% by 2030.<sup>12</sup> If the projected growth in Hispanic student population holds (expected to exceed 4.1 million students by 2026), the number of HSIs will only increase with the 393 “emerging” HSIs today likely to achieve designation in the next decade.<sup>13</sup>

At the Alamo Colleges District, we are proud to have all five of our colleges designated as HSIs with one holding the unique distinction as both an HSI and a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). These designations provide access to additional funding and learning networks to better align our services to meet the needs of our diverse populations.

In fact, an HSI designation unlocks funding opportunities for not only the institution, but also for students via scholarships. Colleges designated as HSIs have access to Title V federal grants and funding from other agencies such as the National Science Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. During the pandemic, federal COVID aid was also enhanced for those colleges designated as HSIs and MSIs providing critical additional funding for emergency student aid and institutional support.

11 Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities. (n.d.). *About Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)*. About HSIs - Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities. Retrieved from [https://www.hacu.net/hacu/About\\_HSIs.asp](https://www.hacu.net/hacu/About_HSIs.asp)

12 2017 National Population Projections Tables: Main Series. (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2017/demo/popproj/2017-summary-tables.html>.

13 Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities. (n.d.). *About Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)*. About HSIs - Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities. Retrieved from [https://www.hacu.net/hacu/About\\_HSIs.asp](https://www.hacu.net/hacu/About_HSIs.asp)

With San Antonio College's (SAC) receipt of the 2021 Aspen Prize as the number one community college in the country, SAC – and our family of colleges – have demonstrated that when provided the resources and tools, our diverse student populations can succeed.

All our Alamo Colleges consistently rank in lists for the top community colleges for serving the highest number of Hispanic/Latino students and associate degrees granted to Hispanic/Latino students.<sup>14</sup> Over 42,000 (66%) of our students are Hispanic. We are the largest Hispanic-Serving Institution in Texas and one of the largest in the United States. Nearly half of our students are considered economically disadvantaged and 73% rely on financial aid and scholarships to pay tuition.

This was affirmed by a recent headline by NBC News which suggests that HSIs provide the most economic mobility for students. It cites a report by think tank, the Third Way, that finds that HSIs make the greatest return on investment and goes on to say that institutions that provide the most economic mobility do so for two main reasons:

**1) They offer a quick return on investment for low-income students.**

**2) They enroll mostly low-and moderate-income students as part of their overall student body.<sup>15</sup>**

Across the nation, community colleges are the area's best economic development strategy. Community colleges that are HSIs and MSIs are evolving their student services to provide more intensive and intentional college and career advising, wraparound student support services, and pathways for life-long learning at an affordable cost.

Now more than ever, our Hispanic/Latino students view the choice of attending college with an eye for return on investment of both time and money.<sup>16</sup>

This is an opportunity for us as community college leaders especially when considering that Hispanic/Latino students are significantly more likely to enroll in institutions primarily awarding associates degrees.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Hispanic Outlook on Education Magazine. (2022, February). *Top 25 Community Colleges for Hispanics*. Hispanic Outlook on Education Magazine. Retrieved from <https://www.hispanicoutlook.com/articles/top-25-community-colleges-hispanics>

<sup>15</sup> Acevedo, N. (2022, January 27). *Colleges serving Hispanics provide most economic mobility, report shows*. NBCNews.com. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/colleges-serving-hispanics-provide-economic-mobility-report-shows-rcna13850>

<sup>16</sup> Brown, S. (2022, February 11). *The Missing Hispanic Students*. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved from [https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-missing-hispanic-students?cid=gen\\_sign\\_in](https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-missing-hispanic-students?cid=gen_sign_in)

<sup>17</sup> Excelencia in Education. (2021). *A Texas Briefing on 25 years of HSIs*. Retrieved from <https://www.edexcelencia.org/25yrs-HSIs-Texas>

These are students who look like me, like my daughters. Students who in many cases are the first ones to go to college and earn a degree.

My own parents – Ruben and Acente Flores – both grew up as migrant farm workers, but overcame the odds and earned college degrees because they knew it was essential to the social and economic mobility of our family.

My father worked hard to provide for his family, he served his community in a number of capacities from his work as a city councilman to creating programs to provide access for urban youth to succeed in college. He dreamed big, prepared me to follow in his footsteps of caring for community and building trust, and taught me service over self, integrity and perseverance. His dream was that I become the first Hispanic Chancellor of the Alamo Colleges District, and because of the leadership qualities he modeled for me, I stand here today serving 100,000 students and 5,000 colleagues as their chancellor – and I have the opportunity, along with my wife Martha, to pass that love of education and those attributes of leadership not only to my two daughters, Mara and Mia, but my entire community.

My father utilized the GI Bill to attend college and eventually became a Dean at San Antonio College – one of the five colleges in the Alamo Colleges District, where I have the privilege of serving as Chancellor.

**Those who need our help to succeed and do better for themselves and their families. These are my neighbors, and fellow community members.**

They are people like Janice Castillo – a former student at Alamo Colleges District Northwest Vista College. Janice dropped out of high school when she became pregnant with her son Nathaniel. But, she realized an education was the only way she could overcome the cycle of poverty to make a better life for her son. She attended classes at one of our regional training centers to get prepared for college, enrolled at Northwest Vista College and went to classes faithfully, and similar to my own mother, often showed up to class with her young son in tow. She exposed him to science camps and other engagement opportunities the colleges offered for young children. Eventually she graduated. She's now studying to earn a master's degree and she's employed with the Alamo Colleges District.



Nathaniel, her son, was the valedictorian of his high school. He had a number of college choices, but chose to enroll at Northwest Vista College. He credits his mother for elevating the family out of poverty and changing the trajectory for future generations of Castillos. Now, young people in the family have an example to follow. First Janice's, now Nathaniel, who recently graduated from Trinity University after having attained a full-ride scholarship, with no student debt. Nathaniel is now living in Austin, working at a global financial services firm and is looking into applying to law school.

These stories are examples of the power education can have on eliminating generational poverty, but the work is complex and involves cycles of transformation. Colleges have to look at disaggregated data with a lens towards elevating our most marginalized communities and take bold actions to advance equity and access for all we serve.

## Prioritizing Outcomes for the Most Marginalized Community Members

The U.S. economy is the largest in the world with nearly 23 trillion in gross domestic product (GDP). However, we continue to find ourselves in the position of not producing enough talent to meet the growing demands of industry.<sup>18</sup> The increased utilization of technology in the workplace and the classroom has only grown during the COVID-19 pandemic, accelerating a skills gap that already existed and creating even further inequities amongst our population.

In a recent report, *"The State of Black Students in Community Colleges,"* the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies found that black student enrollment declined in the U.S. by 18% between Fall 2019 and Fall 2021. During that same time, black or African American student attainment declined. While 39% of white community college students graduated between academic years 2019 and 2021, only 28% of Black or African American students graduated during that same time period.<sup>19</sup>

The report also highlighted an increased need for holistic support of Black students (70% experienced food or housing insecurity or homelessness during the pandemic) and the alarmingly small number of Black or African American community college students that transferred to a four-year university (28% between 2011 and 2017).<sup>20</sup>

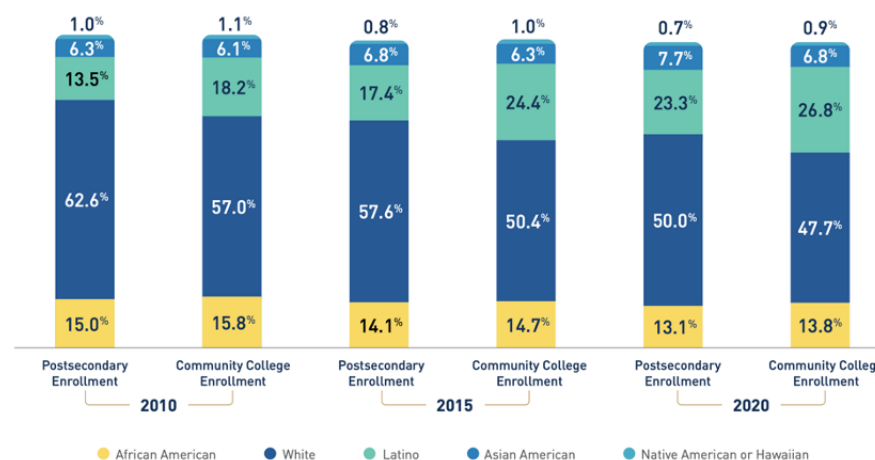
<sup>18</sup> The World Bank. (n.d.). GDP (current US\$). chart. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>

<sup>19</sup> Camardelle, D. A., Kennedy II, B., & Nalley, J. (2021, September 21). *The State of Black Students at Community Colleges*. Retrieved from <https://jointcenter.org/wp-content/The-State-of-Black-Students-at-Community-Colleges/>

<sup>20</sup> Camardelle, D. A., Kennedy II, B., & Nalley, J. (2021, September 21). *The State of Black Students at Community Colleges*. Retrieved from <https://jointcenter.org/wp-content/The-State-of-Black-Students-at-Community-Colleges/>

Figure 1: The share of Black students enrolled in community college fell over the last decade

Postsecondary and community college enrollment by race, 2010-2020



Source: Joint Center analysis of data provided by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Spring 2010 through Spring 2021.

Public and for-profit institutions are included.

Graphic by Camardelle, et al. (2022) Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

So, what do we do to help turn the tide?

The recommended actions outlined in this report align with strategies being implemented at the Alamo Colleges and other colleges across the country.

Those strategies include:

- **Improve access to basic needs/holistic support for students inclusive of child care access**
- **Strengthen transfer pathways**
- **Evaluate community college outcomes by race**
- **Provide a pathway for free community college**

At the Alamo Colleges we have undertaken a transformational journey with continued process improvements to achieve our moonshot of ending generational poverty through education and training.



We also have to reimagine our collective strategic plan and vision of success. Any plan we work under must be aligned and account for our diverse communities. In the state of Texas, much like in other states, the community colleges have worked under a statewide strategic plan but the impact of the pandemic and lagging results in moving the needle for our populations of color have resulted in modifications to that statewide plan.

In 2015, the state of Texas launched a strategic plan, 60x30TX, which aimed to have 60% of Texans ages 25-34 achieve a postsecondary degree by 2030. Although this plan focused on several pathways to postsecondary completion, it failed to account for many industry recognized certificates and a large segment of Texans were left behind. This strategic plan was recently updated to account for these gaps which were exacerbated in the pandemic.

Now, under our new Building a Talent Strong Texas plan, Texas' institutions of higher education will aim to:

**Increase Attainment of Postsecondary Credentials: Ensure 60% of Texans ages 25-34 and 35-64 have a degree, certificate, or other postsecondary credential of value**

**Focus on Postsecondary Credentials of Value: 550,000 students are completing credentials of value each year and 95% of graduates are graduating with no or low undergraduate debt**

**Increase Research, Development & Innovation: Increase to \$1 billion the amount of annual private and federal research & development expenditures**

The inclusion of our adult learners' outcomes and ensuring that our graduates are obtaining credentials of value are significant changes to the plan. According to the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), for academic year 2020-2021, Texas had 2.5 million residents with some college and no degree with roughly 50% of that number encompassing individuals between the ages of 35 and 64. Nationally, that number is almost 39 million with 51.4% of the individuals between the ages of 35 and 64. Not surprisingly, the majority of those in this category are also individuals of color with 40% identifying as a person of color.

**Also reported by the NSC was the fact that nationally, 944,000 individuals with some college and no degree did re-enroll in a post-secondary education with 50.6% of them attending a community college. In fact, the most common pathway for returning students was to re-enroll in a community college after having last attended a community college (363,400 students, 38.5%). Of those that did re-enroll, 60,000 obtained their first-ever postsecondary credential. However, (in San Antonio) our black or African American students were more likely to obtain a certificate (42.7%) while Latino or Hispanic students obtained associate degrees (42.5%).<sup>21</sup> While certificates are of value, we must ensure those who obtain certificates also have unobstructed pathways to higher credentials of value.**

<sup>21</sup> National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2022, May 10). Some College, No Credential Student Outcomes Annual Progress Report – Academic Year 2020/21. *National Student Clearinghouse Research Center*. Retrieved from <https://nscresearchcenter.org/some-college-no-credential/>

At the Alamo Colleges we endeavor to deliver programs and services that create value for our students, taxpayers, and society at large. A degree from the Alamo Colleges results in \$9,400 in annual increased wages for our students. And our colleges contribute a little more than \$2.6 billion in added income annually, equating to about two percent of the region's gross product. These numbers are strong but can always be better.

**All colleges, especially community colleges, play a critical role in providing a pathway for students to increase their economic and social mobility by providing both the technical and essential skills they need for the jobs of today and tomorrow. That is why creating credentials of value is critical if we are to show not only the value of higher education, but improve our state and national economy.**

We know that advancing equity is everyone's responsibility and we are fortunate that our local community leaders along with businesses, nonprofits and our community members have joined us in this journey of transformation and action. Both the city of San Antonio and Bexar County have adopted budget philosophies focused on equity and social determinants of health. This laser focus on their part to ensure our entire community is served has been beneficial for all partners including our colleges as we continue to battle against poverty.

In 2018, the same year San Antonio celebrated its 300-year anniversary, the city was named one of the top 15 best cities in the country to live in.<sup>22</sup> But existing side by side with its many successes is another reality – San Antonio ranks among the most economically segregated cities in the country.

This past year, San Antonio reclaimed the dubious status as the most impoverished major city in the country with an estimated 14.2% of residents in the San Antonio metropolitan area living in poverty during the 2016-2020 period.<sup>23</sup>

Concerning educational attainment, 18.2% of San Antonio area residents possess a bachelor's Degree (2.1% below the national average), while 8.2% hold an associate's Degree (0.5% below the national average).<sup>24</sup>

It is because of this reality, that our community is more focused than ever to advance educational opportunities for all including one of the largest city investments in workforce training and education.

<sup>22</sup> Baddour, A., Stone, D. E., & Cantu, E. (2019). *Investing in Asset Building for San Antonio Families*. Retrieved from [https://npr-brightspot.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy/sites/kstx/files/201907/afn\\_2019\\_scan\\_booklet\\_fnl\\_web.pdf](https://npr-brightspot.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy/sites/kstx/files/201907/afn_2019_scan_booklet_fnl_web.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Cunningham, W. (2022, March 17). *Census: San Antonio remains most impoverished major U.S. city despite some gains*. Retrieved from <https://sanantonioreport.org/census-san-antonio-most-impoverished-major-us-city/>

<sup>24</sup> greater SATX. (2022, October 3). *San Antonio-New Braunfels, TX Economy Overview*. Retrieved from <https://greateratx.com>

## Creating Diverse Pathways for Students

Research tells us that in order to help our students persist and complete their post-secondary education, we must create diverse pathways for our students while also offering holistic student support. Affordability is only part of the equation.

Our path toward transformation and action began after the 2011- 2012 academic year. At that point in time we awarded 6,271 degrees and certificates, saw students take more than 4.5 years to complete an associate's degree, and those that did achieve an associate degree did so with more than 90 semester credit hours. These metrics were unacceptable and required action across the system.

Dual credit/dual enrollment is well regarded as an evidence-based practice that improves postsecondary attainment for students. Recent studies have also found that dual credit can improve “student outcomes, including high school graduation, college enrollment, college persistence and completion and time to degree.”<sup>25</sup>

In fact, the U.S. Department of Education recently announced a commitment to invest resources to strengthen and expand dualcredit/dual enrollment across the country.<sup>26</sup> But, questions about rigor and accessibility for disenfranchised populations continue to plague dual credit systems and can't be ignored as we expand these opportunities for our high school students across the country. It is why we at the Alamo Colleges have looked at not only how we can expand these opportunities, but how we ensure our offerings are aligned and distributed across the region in an effective and equitable way.

The Alamo Colleges is the largest provider of dual credit programs in our region – offering free college classes for high school students through traditional dual credit, Early College High Schools (ECHS), Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECHS), and our own Alamo Academies, giving students access to education and the opportunity to graduate with a two-year degree while working toward their high school diploma – eliminating financial barriers to education and giving them a head start in life.

In the Spring 2021 semester, 14,304 high school students from across our service region participated in our high school programs. Our high school program student population

closely mirrors our overall student population with 59% female and a little over 61% identifying as Hispanic/Latino. Additionally, we were able to award 662 degrees and certificates that semester with an 84% Productive Grade Rate (PGR).

Simply providing dual credit opportunities is not enough. We have to ensure our students receive the full value of the course credit and that is not only transfers but is applied to their program of study. Texas, like many other states, does require colleges to accept dual credit courses but it does not always mean those credits are applied toward the student's degree program.

The Alamo Colleges instituted a new internal system, “red-yellow-green” for benchmarking how many credit hours a dual credit student can take while in high school. The system provides for stepped increases in semester credit hours depending on how

focused the student has identified their career cluster and college major. This allows for our college teams to catch and better support students on their journey and prevent the student from taking too many courses, wasting time and money for them and their families.

While we know offering expanded opportunities to high school students benefits both the student and our colleges, we also realize that college programs have to better align with our K-12 system and industry partners.

With more than 350 degree and certificate programs in our network, our colleges organized programs into six career clusters called the AlamoINSTITUTES. These institutes now align with both K-12 and industry and provide a starting point for students, enrollment coaches, and assigned advisors to identify a career interest and create a tailored individual pathway for each and every one of our students.

Since 2016, all students at the Alamo Colleges District have chosen an institute as a broad decision toward a career pathway. It is an approach that has paved the way for our students to take only the courses they need to be job or transfer ready and reflects our purposeful commitment to putting students first.

Another step in our transformation was our work to eliminate financial barriers for our community to access a postsecondary education. As outlined in College Promise for All, the costs for a college education have doubled in the last 30 years with the average cost for tuition and fees at a community college at \$3,770. This estimate does not account for the larger portion of a student's cost to attend college which includes housing, food, childcare, transportation, books, and healthcare.<sup>27</sup>

25 Field, K. (2020, September 22). *The Rise of Dual Credit*. Retrieved from <https://www.educationnext.org/rise-dual-credit-more-students-take-college-classes-high-school-degree-attainment-rigor/>

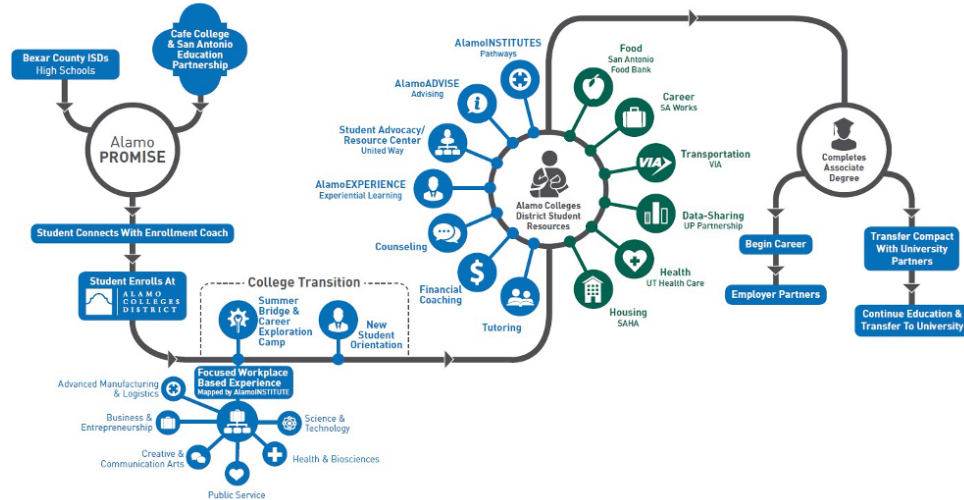
26 U.S. Department of Education. (2022, September 1). *The power of dual enrollment: The equitable expansion of college access and success*. ED.gov Blog. Retrieved from <https://blog.ed.gov/2022/09/the-power-of-dual-enrollment-the-equitable-expansion-of-college-access-and-success/>

27 Kanter, M., Cloud, R. B., & Lazarowitz, D. (2021, April 16). *College Promise for All - Preparing America's Talent Pipeline with Universal Access to, through, and beyond Postsecondary Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.collegepromise.org/cpfa>

These rising costs have only exacerbated the attainment gap between our white students and our Hispanic and Black students. This is where College Promise programs provide an opportunity to change the narrative for our students of color.

In Fall 2019, together with the buy-in from our city and county leaders, business community, independent school districts, nonprofit organizations and community members, we launched our largest initiative to date – AlamoPROMISE.

## The AlamoPROMISE Ecosystem



Since the beginning, the AlamoPROMISE has been simple: every student – no matter their circumstances – should be free to pursue their full potential. Each and every one of our AlamoPROMISE students is an investment in the prosperity of the city and the families we serve. This is why we have been fortunate to receive annual funding from our city in addition to the private donations. The municipal funding is a critical difference from most programs and is what makes our work more of a collective impact effort. Our residents have bought into the promise we are offering them and in return we are committed to delivering on that promise.

Now in its fourth year, graduating seniors from 50 area high schools – mostly in low-income areas – are currently eligible. Our goal is to expand to all high schools in Bexar County by next year. Last year, we graduated our inaugural cohort and had a record-breaking year with 10,000 students “saving” their seat to be an AlamoScholar.

More than 400 Promise programs exist throughout the country, including a statewide Promise program here in North Carolina. Remarkable growth and sustainability have continued in communities, and each Promise program is unique to them – designed for the individual needs of local students.

AlamoPROMISE  
is our collective  
community  
moonshot  
to end cycles  
of generational  
poverty in  
the greater San  
Antonio region.

**What makes our program unique is our support that goes beyond the classroom to help our students with their postsecondary journey. In addition to tuition-free assistance, AlamoPROMISE Scholars have access to wraparound services such as free food and clothing, low-cost child care and healthcare, and emergency financial aid for things like rent and car payments.**

Ninety-two percent of our PROMISE Scholars are Latino/Hispanic, or African American. These are students that are coming from some of the highest poverty neighborhoods within our community and actually within the United States. Our students don’t look at us and say, “Can I afford to go to the Alamo Colleges?” They consider whether they can afford to work

less hours and still put food on the table. AlamoPROMISE helps alleviate most or part of that consideration.

AlamoPROMISE is helping out students, like 19-year-old Jaedan Montero, who was recently profiled as part of a PBS NewsHour segment.<sup>28</sup>

Jaedan learned about AlamoPROMISE in the Fall of 2020, when he was a high school senior. The thought of piling on college debt overwhelmed him and his family.

His family makes too much to qualify for Pell grants or other assistance, but not enough to cover the cost of tuition at a four-year university.

He chose to enter his first year of college as a student because of the free tuition after he realized it would be better for him financially. He is now thriving and doesn’t have any student debt to his name. He has now entered his second year of college and has a 4.0 GPA.

Jaedan has aspirations to work in the high-wage, high-demand cybersecurity field and is saving up money so he can continue his higher education at a local university.

<sup>28</sup> Sreenivasan, H., & Wise, C. (2022, May 4). *San Antonio, Texas tackles education inequality with free or reduced college tuition*. PBS. Retrieved from <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/san-antonio-texas-tackles-education-inequality-with-free-or-reduced-college-tuition>

## Providing Holistic Student Support

As community college leaders, we know that providing diverse pathways is not all we have to do to help our students succeed. Part of the work involves creating support for our students, both for their academic and personal well-being. At the Alamo Colleges, we have worked to understand the needs of our community, and have deployed holistic student support innovations that match those needs. We know that students come where they feel welcome and stay when they feel cared about.

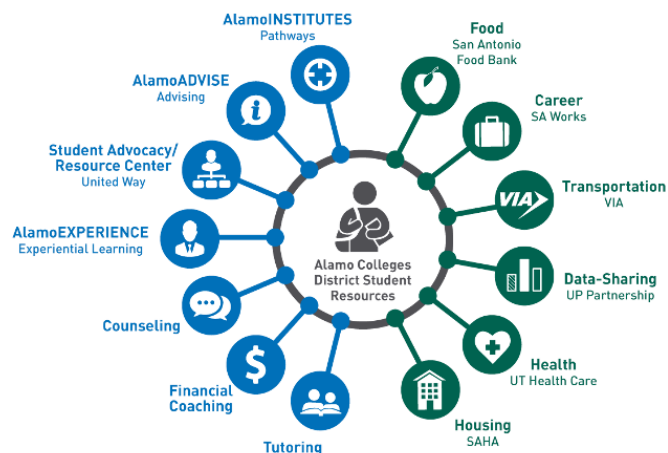
Key among our innovations is AlamoADVISE, which we believe is the backbone and part of the DNA that has taken our organization to where it is today.

Established in 2014, AlamoADVISE was designed in response to several challenges encountered by the Alamo Colleges District students: a 21% transfer rate, completion time of 4.6 years, and an average of 92 credit hours at degree completion. These numbers were not acceptable and needed to change.

The time it took for students to complete a degree a decade ago was unsettling for us. Federal, state, local and accrediting bodies were expecting more and more of our students and our colleges. Likewise, our students were needing more attention.

Fast forward to today, AlamoADVISE has had several iterations of improvement and is further evolving as part of our journey.

## Alamo Colleges District Student Resources



AlamoADVISE has provided our students personalized pathways to success, reduced the time to graduation and saved our students money, with certified advisors at a ratio of 350 students to one advisor. This rate is much lower than the national average and is in place

to ensure students stay on the right path, specifically because many of our students are first generation students with limited exposure to college life.

This year I am proud to say we are furthering our commitment to student success with approved investments by lowering the advisor to student ratio from 350- to-1 to 300- to-1; enhancing advising to corequisite and workforce students, extending advising to high school students and expanding the peer advisor model across all five colleges.

It is an intentional case management model requiring certified advisors to help students formalize an academic plan, create a mission statement, and meet at 15, 30, and 45-hour touchpoints.

These designated touchpoints allow advisors to monitor progress, identify challenges and design strategies to help students maintain momentum to achieve the goals of completion and transfer or employment. Advisors are trained in holistic advising to support individual student needs, including developing individual success plans and implementing strategies to support our diverse student population. It is an investment that will be worth it in the long run and we have the data to support it.

And we're further saving students time and money through our Transfer Advising Guides (TAGs). With clear and concise pathways through TAGs, students can transfer with courses that are degree applicable not only for the Alamo Colleges but the student's university of choice. That saves students time and money and minimizes any loss of credit hours.

**Time is the enemy of degree completion and this approach not only saves our students time but allows them to be job-ready when they graduate from one of the Alamo Colleges or to transfer to a university. About 75% of Alamo Colleges' students transfer to a four-year university upon completion of their associate's degree.**

Nationally, only 30% of community college students transfer to four-year universities to continue their studies.<sup>29</sup> On average, those students lose 40% of their credits, forcing them to spend more time and money to repeat courses.<sup>30</sup>

TAGs provide a two-year, course-by-course crosswalk from the Alamo Colleges to the university of choice by reverse mapping all required university degree requirements for each university major to an Alamo Colleges pre-major. These seamless transfer pathways mean students don't just transfer – they transfer with degree applicability.

<sup>29</sup> National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2022, September 28). *Tracking Transfer - Measures of Effectiveness in Helping Community College Students to Complete Bachelor's Degrees*. Retrieved from <https://nscresearchcenter.org/tracking-transfer/>

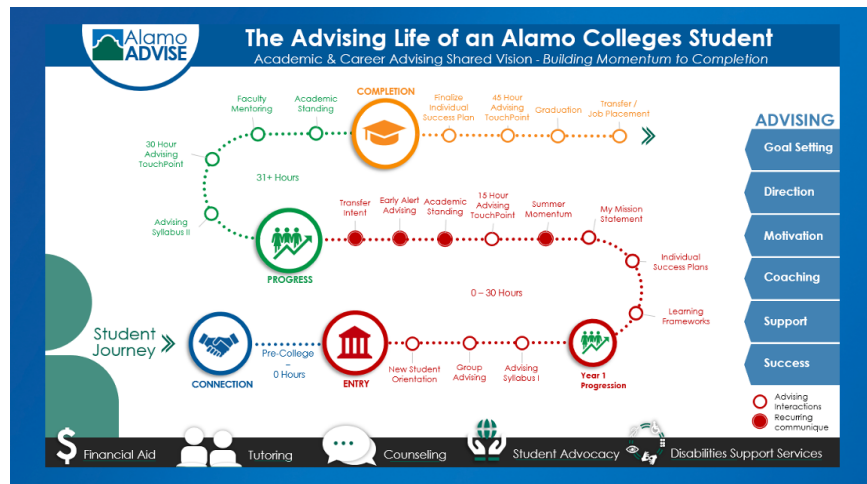
<sup>30</sup> U.S. Government Accountability. (2017, August 14). *Higher education: Students need more information to help reduce challenges in transferring college credits*. Higher Education: Students Need More Information to Help Reduce Challenges in Transferring College Credits | U.S. GAO. Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-17-574>



Students who start at the Alamo Colleges now earn their degree, which requires 60 semester credit hours, in an average of 65.1 semester credit hours, compared to the Texas state average of 81 credit hours.

On average, TAGs provide \$40,215 savings at public universities and \$65,435 at private universities. In 2020, the potential savings for the 16,270 students who transferred and followed an agreed upon TAG for the university of their choice was \$374 million. In total, we have had 88,837 students transfer to a four-year university from 2017 to 2021.

Along with these academic supports, the Alamo Colleges have worked to expand our student resources to provide more holistic support.



Students attending our colleges are entering with increased needs for basic life support, requiring us to expand our scope of services. Those students who come from families with economic hardships don't lose that the minute they walk onto our campuses. In a recent survey of Alamo Colleges students, we found that over 60% of students identified needing support for housing, food and utilities, over 48% needed mental health support, and over 42% stated they needed general medical/health care support.

Thus, as part of a district-wide commitment to student success and meeting the needs of students experiencing poverty, on-campus advocacy centers have been implemented at all five Alamo Colleges.

But we understand that we may not be the experts in how to deliver all services, so we have partnered with several local nonprofits allowing us to offer everything a student may need to persist at our colleges.

Before the start of the pandemic, we launched a student helpline to assist students calling with requests for advocacy assistance. Funded by the United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County, this helpline became critical during the pandemic in connecting students to student emergency aid and other resources needed. During the 2021-2022 academic year alone, our advocacy center helpline fielded over 9,200 calls.

Food insecurity is another issue many community college students face nationwide. In collaboration with our San Antonio Food Bank, we established pop-up markets that provide healthy food to students and community members with more than 1.33 million pounds of food provided since 2021. Beyond food distribution, our Advocacy Centers also provide access to Benefits Navigators who assist eligible students with the SNAP application process giving them access to a much-needed resource.

**Access to healthcare and mental health counseling are basic needs our students often lack. In partnership with our local medical school, UT Health San Antonio, the Alamo Colleges now provide access to primary health care through our Wellness 360 centers. These centers provide services to students with little to no cost. While this may sound like something that can only be done in a major metro, this can also be done in partnership with a hospital or medical school outside of your immediate region through telehealth networks.**

When first launched, Wellness 360 was mainly a telehealth service for our students as we were in the midst of the height of the pandemic. However, in the last year we have been able to slowly expand our onsite offerings including extending this service to our faculty and staff.

And not to be forgotten is access to mental health. Students have access to licensed counselors and social workers as part of our advocacy centers. Provided with a variety of other braided resources accessible to students, mental health access will continue to be a priority for our colleges.



Some individuals may question why we provide the number of holistic services we do, but the reality is they are absolutely essential for our students to persist. One of my colleagues at Palo Alto College once said that anything getting in the way of our students succeeding is absolutely in our lane. I couldn't agree more and our investment in this type of holistic support for our students have resulted in positive outcomes.

In fact, at the Alamo Colleges we have realized a return on this investment and partnerships. Persistence rates have increased amongst our students who utilized and received case management services from our advocacy centers. **Between Fall 2020 and Fall 2021, the persistence rate for our students, both full-time and part-time, who utilized our advocacy centers was seven points higher than their peers who did not utilize our advocacy centers.** This demonstrates the value-add student support services provide our students and their families.

## Reengaging Those Left Behind

**The “community” in community colleges is not just a part of our name, it is an apt description of our mission and the people we serve. We as community colleges are established to serve all people and many purposes. If we just look around our campuses and listen to the stories of our students we can see a kaleidoscope of talent, each choosing to attend our colleges for different purposes. All important and all deserving of our support.**

As I mentioned earlier, the San Antonio region has been plagued by low educational attainment rates. With the onset of the pandemic came thousands of people suddenly losing their jobs and filing into food bank lines – images that shocked the country and brought to bear the reality of what was occurring in our community. It was shortly after those images made the national news that the Mayor of San Antonio and his fellow council members embarked on one of the largest local investments in the U.S. devoted to workforce development.

During the pandemic, our respective states, cities and counties received federal aid to assist. In June 2020, the San Antonio city council approved what was called their COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Plan, later rebranded as Train for Jobs SA, as a short-term approach to build back the San Antonio economy. This plan included millions of dollars in investment to the workforce development ecosystem in the region. The goal – to provide subsidized job training and certificates for demand occupations to City of San Antonio residents. Target populations for the program included displaced workers with a high school diploma or equivalency or less, veterans, persons with disabilities, the formerly incarcerated, and those experiencing poverty. All participants received intake and career counseling support, a living wage stipend while in training, case management and wrap-around support throughout. Train for Jobs SA was phased out at the start of 2022, but it led the way to our city’s new workforce program, Ready to Work.

Approved by 77% of San Antonians who voted in November 2020, the Ready to Work program is supported through a one-eighth cent sales tax collected by the city for a five-year term. Over the next five years, it is anticipated that nearly \$200 million dollars will be invested in the program providing thousands of San Antonians workforce training along with case management and wrap-around support.

So where do the Alamo Colleges fit within Ready to Work? We are proud to serve as one of the four primary contractors providing services for Ready to Work providing intake, assessment, career coaching, case management, wrap-around support, workforce training and assistance with job placement. For the Alamo Colleges, our goal is to train 7,844 individuals as part of our city’s collective goal to train 28,000 San Antonians.

Ready to Work is not our first foray into workforce development and certainly not our first partnership with employers to develop tailor-made training programs to fit their needs.

But it is the first time our community has come together at this scale to hone in on one of the core drivers of poverty in our region.

In fact, the work and investment being made in San Antonio is running parallel to statewide efforts in Texas to re-examine not only how the state strategically invests in workforce development but also how community colleges can lead in this work.

Ensuring our workforce programs are aligned and leading to success is of utmost importance. In the last decade, we have seen fewer good paying jobs (those paying at least \$65,000) available for individuals with only a high school diploma (falling from 51% to 11% in the last decade). And we know that more than 70% of jobs by 2030 will require some kind of postsecondary degree even if not a baccalaureate degree. This in combination with the tight labor market has elevated the need to scale reskilling and upskilling programs.

Short-term and micro-credentials are not new to many of us in this room and certainly not to the Alamo Colleges where we have been privileged to work with industry partners on some successful programs to date. As an example, in partnership with Google, we offer students a six-month training program where they can earn a Google IT Support certificate for only \$179. This is less than the average cost of books for one three-hour course. And the skills taught in this program provide entry into computer user support specialist jobs, which pay an entry wage of \$31,700 and a median wage of \$47,459 in Texas.

Allied healthcare is also a focus of our colleges and utilizing both institutional funds along with grant funds, our AlamoONLINE team has worked diligently to help create a micro-credentialing pathway. To illustrate, our students can begin with a Level 1 Certificate Nurse Aide for Health Care credential and work their way up to our newly launched BSN program. This type of innovation and fiscal investment from state and federal leaders is what is needed to not only help our communities economically thrive but to also help lift individuals out of poverty.

So far, I have spoken about those students entering our campuses who are college ready and are looking to take that next step on their educational journey, but for so many they still haven’t achieved a high school diploma.

In the San Antonio metro area, nearly 200,000 individuals lack a high school diploma or equivalency. Many of these individuals have supported themselves and their families through long hours in the hospitality industry, one of the largest industries in our region. With sites like the Alamo and River Walk, our service industry has been at the heart of what makes San Antonio unique amongst our peer cities in the state and nation. But as soon as the pandemic hit and restaurants began to close, so did the jobs for our hospitality workers.

As part of our city's workforce recovery program, we at the Alamo Colleges helped provide high school equivalency support to those individuals needing it. The goal at the time was to get those students in, have them obtain their HSE or GED and then move on into a short-term training program. However, many of our students, now empowered and reaffirmed in their belief that they could achieve more, have elected to enroll in longer-term programs.

Students like Destinee Martinez, who came without a clear vision of what they wanted to do when they started but who soon realized she wanted a healthcare career to better herself and her family.

As I stood at the graduation ceremony for our San Antonio College graduates this past May, I was in awe of what I saw. On stage, there were adult learners receiving their high school equivalency standing next to high school students earning their associate degrees along with other associate degree graduates all leading up to our first class of BSN program graduates. The sheer power of seeing the diversity of our students, diversity of programs, and how we provide our community various entry points along the entire pathway was extraordinary to see. It was an example of what we as a community college are and what we can continue to be.

You see we are partners for all of our students' journeys, no matter their life circumstances.

We are partners with Markisha Beachman, the single mother of two; Nathaniel Castillo, the high school valedictorian, who chose Alamo Colleges because he wanted time to better access his choices; Jaedan Montero, the AlamoPROMISE Scholar, who didn't want to be burdened by student debt, but wanted a quality education; Destinee Martinez, a Train for Jobs program graduate, who now is working a better job in the healthcare industry; and countless others.

I am inspired by the success stories of our students on a daily basis. The common thread among all of our students is they want better lives for themselves and their families. It is the

same vision my parents Ruben and Acenete had for me as they moved from working in the field to graduating with a college degree. This is that same vision my wife Martha and I have for our daughters Mara and Mia and I have for the tens of thousands of students served at the Alamo Colleges.

As community college leaders we have the ability to better the lives of the students and families we serve.

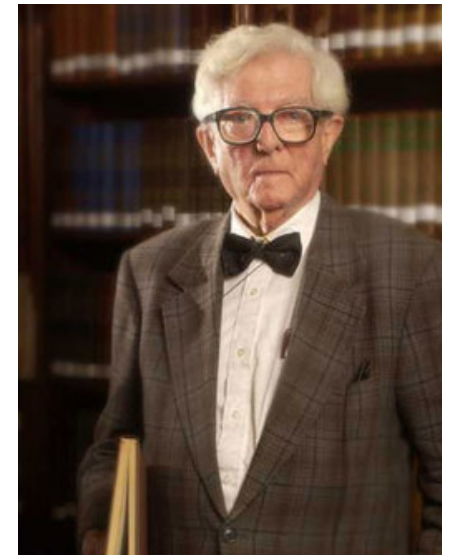
This is a job we all have to do together. We are creating leaders one person at a time to change our communities and the world.

And preparing a new generation to follow our footsteps.

Thank you/Muchisimas Gracias to my Alamo Colleges District colleagues, my family and to each of you!

## About Dallas Herring

Born in 1916 in Rose Hill, North Carolina, W. Dallas Herring made it his life's work to build a system that would serve all of North Carolina's residents by preparing them for productive work and active citizenship. He began his career in public service in 1939, when, at the age of 23, he became the mayor of his hometown, making him the youngest mayor in the country at the time. Beginning in 1955, Herring served on the North Carolina State Board of Education for almost 25 years. For 20 of those years, he served as chairman of the board. During his tenure on the State Board of Education, he oversaw the development of a statewide system of technical education institutes that eventually became the North Carolina Community College System. Throughout his career, Herring was guided by his vision of educational "opportunity for all the people." In a letter to Community College Review in 1973, he wrote:



*"The only valid philosophy for North Carolina is the philosophy of total education: a belief in the incomparable worth of all human beings, whose claims upon the state are equal before the law and equal before the bar of public opinion; whose talents... the state needs and must develop to the fullest possible degree. That is why the doors to the institutions in North Carolina's system of Community Colleges must never be closed to anyone..."*

When asked how he wished to be remembered, Herring shared that his hope was to be seen as "human (and I hope humane), imperfect, persistent, bull-headed..." Today, nearly 60 years after the state's community college system was founded, we reflect on Herring's accomplishments as those of a leader who grappled with the issues of his day and dared to, in his words, rock the boat. By planting seeds that have since transformed our state, Herring and his legacy live on through his many contributions to education in North Carolina.

## Supporting the Belk Center

Our work is made possible by the generous support of alumni, foundation partners, and friends who share our belief in the power of transformational community college leadership.

Gifts to the **Belk Center Fund** have an immediate impact by providing resources we can use to advance our key priorities:

- **Developing exceptional leaders** - Our award-winning **doctoral program in community college leadership** is educating a diverse pipeline of aspiring executives, while the support the Belk Center provides to new and experienced leaders provides them with the knowledge and skills they need to prepare for and thrive in their roles.
- **Anticipating and responding to colleges' needs** - Guided by a national network of partners, the Belk Center acts as a catalyst for change by setting a **research agenda** that encourages colleges to consider what's possible and providing the customized tools and support networks leaders and their teams need to make informed improvements.
- **Advancing innovative partnerships** - Together with college leaders and their teams, the groups and governing bodies that support them, and like-minded organizations that recognize and center the value of community colleges, the Belk Center builds trust and a shared vision of what's possible in the future, along with a collaborative plan for how to get there.
- **Advocating for equity** - Through efforts like our **trailblazer profiles**, the Belk Center is committed to creating an equitable future where colleges promote access, opportunity, and achievement for students while increasing the representation of diverse leaders.

Gifts to the W. Dallas Herring Professorship Endowment support the work of the Dallas Herring Professor in developing, implementing, and growing the Dallas Herring Lecture Series.

### Will you join us by giving to support the work of the Belk Center?

All gifts accepted by the College of Education are managed by the NC State University Foundation, Inc. If you need assistance making a gift, please call our Gift Processing Office at (919) 515-7827.

#### ➔ Online:

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