Dear Dr. Royal,

Thank you for the opportunity to work with Holyoke Community College (HCC) in support of improving student outcomes and organizational workflows. As promised, the following report provides detailed recommendations based on HCC’s engagement with Achieving the Dream (ATD), and specifically includes the results from the June 2020 Holistic Student Supports (HSS) Opportunity Assessment. These recommendations also take into consideration HCC’s aspiration to be an exemplar 2-year college for adult learners. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us directly. We welcome an opportunity to debrief this report and to continue supporting HCC as you work to support the academic achievement and economic well-being of your students and college community.

Sincerely,

Shauna Davis, Dr. Laurie Fladd, and Dr. Monica Parrish Trent
Achieving the Dream, Inc.
During the week of June 1st, 2020, Shauna Davis, Laurie Fladd and Monica Trent (ATD HSS Consultants) conducted a multi-day comprehensive virtual opportunity assessment with HCC faculty, staff and administrators in which we explored the resources, policy, practice, current design of student supports and advising, and the needs of faculty and staff in supporting scalable and sustainable change in support of improving outcomes for the adult student population at HCC. This visit confirms that while HCC strives to become more agile and dynamic in addressing the diversity of student needs, there is no shortage of faculty, staff, and leaders who care deeply, and who passionately champion removal of challenges in support of student success. HCC has a comprehensive set of services, programs, interventions and supports to address identified needs within the general student population. As such, this report does not seek to advise on the creation of additional services, rather, the emphasis is on organizational structure, data informed decision making, and program improvement.

For this visit, HCC requested a focus on the comprehensive needs of adult students in support of recruitment, retention, and completion. While HSS is not limited to advising or the development of specific wrap around supports, often advising and wrap around support programs serve as the connective tissue of the student experience in a mission critical function by connecting students to academic and personal supports and services necessary for the retention and completion of adult students. During the virtual opportunity assessment, we identified several challenges with the current processes and systems at HCC that support adult students. As such, this report takes a targeted view at those systems, processes, policies and workflows to address the foundational issues that illuminate the following student and institutional stressors:

- Need for institution wide data informed decision-making practices
- Need for proactive guidance and connection for adult students in the onboarding process, to reduce students having to stumble into the right office or program for guidance
- Need for intentional integration of adult learner supports between the first touch and through the completion of the first semester
- Need for broader access and scalability of specialized programs that serve small numbers of adult learners with high touch supports.
• Need to address equity gaps within adult learner persistence rates when disaggregated by race, gender, PT/FT status, and first-generation status

• Need to systemically address the high rates of student basic needs insecurity within the campus community (food and housing), with almost all underrepresented groups disproportionately impacted, at the point of recruitment and onboarding processes through proactive integration and intervention

• Need to audit academic and student affairs policies and practices to determine the impact and unintended consequences for the adult learner population

• Need to improve student communication, internal communication, campus wayfinding and the college website to incorporate student-centered design of messages, workflows, and systems

In addition, to improve student supports and advising at HCC, the following core recommendations include:

1. Improving College Website and Wayfinding
2. Developing a Comprehensive Adult Learner Support Program
3. Adopting data-informed decision making at the service delivery, program, and institutional level
4. Implementing technology and communication systems in support of student communication and coordination of service delivery
5. Implementing flexible parts-of-term course schedules and adult student-centered academic policies
ATD Core Concepts

As colleges embark on institutional change efforts, ATD encourages reflection on and the development of core institutional capacities as represented on the ATD Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool (ICAT) wheel. This assessment is part of a framework that includes seven essential capacities that must be in place for colleges to create a student-focused culture that promotes student success. As organizational dynamics and environmental factors shift, colleges must continue to take stock of and develop deep institutional habits that enable transformational change and systemic interventions.

In addition, we recognize that colleges must focus on structural, process, and attitudinal changes to successfully implement, scale, and sustain student success efforts. These interrelated dimensions of change need intentional consideration, action, and support, coupled with organizational readiness and sustained leadership presence to bring about what is essentially transformative culture change.

Levels of Change

This consulting report also includes references to three levels of institutional action. They are referred to as Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 changes. These levels represent changes that may occur at the individual, department, and college level.

A brief description can be found below:

**Level 1** – These are changes primarily based in individual attitude, behavior and/or choice. College employees can make a change at this level with deep personal commitment and these changes often involve commitment to adopting a new approach and adapting that approach in daily work. This includes working with faculty and frontline staff to identify student engagement strategies, internal service standards, and communication practices to improve student touchpoints, accuracy of information, and timeliness of referrals.
Level 2 – These are changes primarily based at the department or unit support level requiring support from department/unit/division leadership to work as a group to make these changes, and require leadership endorsement, resources, and facilitation to ensure a cohesive approach.

This includes working with academic, student services, and operations unit leaders to identify opportunities for coordinated efforts, communication practices to improve collaborative intervention design and delivery, establish common definitions, and establish clarity on roles and shared responsibilities.

Level 3 – These changes require executive level support, endorsement, resources, and institutional prioritization to achieve. They may involve policy, scaled practices across the institution, and structural changes to ensure the college has the foundation to achieve a stated goal or strategy at a systems level.

This includes working with executive leaders to identify policy recommendations, structural changes to support sustainable change, faculty and staff professional development needs at scale, faculty engagement strategies, integration points for high impact practices, and college systems opportunities and gaps.

As you read through the recommendations below, we will address opportunities for improvement along these three areas of change. You will also notice that the recommendations in this report center on Level 2 and Level 3 changes. This is intentional as we acknowledge the depth of the Level 1 work completed by HCC program staff and seek to provide recommendations that support foundational capacity development to enable the adaptation and implementation of ideas identified by faculty and staff, needing institutional structural and process changes to operationalize.

**Structure of Recommendations**

This report is broken down into one foundational and five core recommendations, in which we placed a critical eye on HCC structures, processes, and attitudes of faculty, staff, and leaders. The results of the core findings are unpacked in detail.
along with a summary of recommendations and next steps at the conclusion of this document.

We have identified a **foundational recommendation** for any and all current and future academic and non-academic programs, interventions, supports and services.

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**FOUNDATIONAL RECOMMENDATION**

Applying Student-Centered Systems Design to **All** Programs, Supports, Services and Interventions

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In addition, to improve student supports and advising at HCC, the following core recommendations include:

1. Improving College Website and Wayfinding
2. Developing a Comprehensive Adult Learner Support Program
3. Adopting data-informed decision making at the service delivery, program, and institutional level
4. Implementing technology and communication systems in support of student communication and coordination of service delivery
5. Implementing flexible parts-of-term course schedules, and adult student-centered academic policies

**Recommendation Framing**

HCC has completed several activities to identify needs and solutions in support of student success. This includes developing committees, supplemental programs, working to understanding the “as is” state of advising and student supports, identifying student needs and campus and community resources to help students address their hierarchy of needs and maintain matriculation.

While the results of this comprehensive report take into account the previous work completed, the fundamental approach of this report is to apply a systems thinking approach to improving more than just parts or activities within aspects of the student experience. Our approach addresses the fundamental challenges in the systemic design of the current suite of supports and services, to support the development of a comprehensive learner support program at HCC.
**Foundational Recommendation:**

Apply Student-Centered Systems Design to All Programs, Supports, Services and Interventions

**Holistic Student Supports Definition**

- Defined as the cohesive suite of services that help students address the academic and non-academic factors vital to retention and completion
- Embody intentional focus on the types of services, the ways in which those services are delivered, and how students are connected to the services
- More than a large quantity of disparate services

By definition and intention, holistic student supports is rooted in intentional systemic design of supports and services that encompass five design principles. We call these design principles the SSIPP model. In the SSIPP model, we look for supports that are intentionally designed to be:

- Sustained
- Strategic
- Integrated
- Proactive
- Personalized

Implementing a holistic student supports strategy requires a systemic approach to addressing retention and completion. It is the understanding that retention and completion are the byproduct of intentional design. To improve those outcomes, many pieces and parts within the college must be in alignment, working towards a greater goal. While individual department or unit preferences may surface, student-centered design is based on keeping the student at the center of the decision making and considering how the student experiences all aspects of the college.

Research supports that isolated and disconnected interventions may yield a return for a small number of students but are not sustainable and scalable. As a strength, Holyoke Community College has a vast array of student supports, services and interventions; however, these supports, services, and interventions have not been designed to work as a coordinated system of supports from a student-centric point of view. Meaning, each discrete program, support, or service includes some aspects of the SSIPP design principles; however, consistently they are not integrated into the student path and they are not designed for strategic integration for faculty, staff and administration in addressing the complex needs of a diverse student body.
While there are pockets of excellence in programming and supports at Holyoke, these pockets of excellence are not designed to help address the need for overall systemic redesign of student supports at the college.

**HCC Process Mapping Discovery**

The core foundation of this engagement is the facilitation of a process mapping exercise. Conducted over multiple days, the ATD team worked with a cross-functional and cross-hierarchical group of faculty and staff to identify services, supports, programs, and processes that currently exist at HCC in support of the adult student. The HCC participants were instructed to walk the facilitators through the student experience with the college from first contact through the completion of their first semester of class. The student persona used was that of an adult learner attempting to navigate through the processes and numerous supports. A scaled down version of the map is found below, however, a pdf version of this map is attached to this report.

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**Holyoke Community College Adult Student Persona**

- **Name:** Holly Oke
- **Age:** 27 years old
- **Employment:** Works a part-time job
- **Family:** Has a small child
- **Other:** Uses public transportation

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Figure illustrates the student onboarding and advising process from their initial interest to the end of the 1st term. For this exercise, adult credit seeking students were used as the subjects, and faculty and staff were asked a series of questions to help identify how real students experience what appear to be clearly identified steps.

Holly (student persona) can inquire about HCC from a number of entry points that include the workforce, state agencies, other colleges, adult education, personal enrichment courses, non-recruiting events and more traditional recruiting paths. Once she applies, she begins the onboarding process that includes being admitted, taking a placement test (if necessary), and advising (Ed Planning).

Once admitted, Holly learns about supports available to her in an email from the admissions office. She may also get referred from the testing center, especially if she didn’t score very high on the English portion of the exam and someone identifies a possible need for Academic ESL.
Holly will attend Ed Planning after testing (if testing was required). During Ed Planning Holly spends about an hour getting information on her placement score, how to navigate DegreeWorks, short- and long-term academic or career goals, a plan to graduation, how to read her semester schedule, the process for billing /payment and refund policy, the process for ordering her textbooks, orientation sign-up, how to access email, how to log onto My HCC/online services, how to use Moodle, the role of her assigned academic advisor, and available student support services and resources. The session may also include information on transfer options/opportunities and information on financial aid.

Holly thinks, “OMG, there is so much information for me to remember, I don’t need these supports right now, and I just want to start classes!”

Holly leaves Ed Planning with a schedule of classes and she is encouraged (that means you can do it now or some other time) to pay her bill and get the materials and supplies she will need to begin classes. Orientation is offered close to the start of the semester and is strongly encouraged (that means not really needed to Holly, plus she has to work and cannot afford to make a trip to campus just for that) but there is no penalty/accountability for not attending. Additionally, several support offices staff information tables in a “resource fair” after orientation and before the first day of classes. This is also not required so the information from both orientation and the resource fair are available to students (if they come on campus for several hours), but they are not required to engage.

Since both full-time and part-time instructors choose their books and materials for their courses, availability of the resources can depend on the amount of time the instructor has had to prepare for the course. Students that take courses taught by part-time instructors, many who are hired close to the start of classes, may not have books and materials in the bookstore prior to the start of the semester.

Holly is new to college and gets very nervous when she goes to get her books and can’t find them after she has taken the bus to campus and paid for childcare for the afternoon.

HCC has many resources that are available to help adult learners like Holly. Programs such as TCC, New Directions, STRIVE, THRIVE, Academic ESL, OSDDS, and Pathways can help a student from the start of their journey to completion. The process map demonstrates that faculty and staff identified clear connections between the programs, services, and supports, and recognized that a student like Holly may be in contact with several of these programs, services, and supports simultaneously or over the duration of their matriculation at HCC. However, students like Holly are either referred to these offices in passive ways or the information about these supports is included in a busy information session where students may be
overloaded by the sheer volume of information being provided to them at one time and subsequently, the importance of these supports can be overlooked.

For students who take advantage of supports, mapping participants agreed that most of these programs, supports, and services have multiple touchpoints with students who fit intersecting profiles and those touchpoints occur over their educational journey. Participants struggled with identifying intentional institutional design to ensure students were proactively connected to services and supports in a meaningful way with sustained engagement over the duration of the student journey. In addition, participants representing critical supports for students like Holly cited the lack of capacity to communicate, share information internally to proactively address student needs, and/or meet regularly to identify shared learning. They also cited the lack of intentional design in developing shared learning and continuous improvement sessions to improve student interventions, and/or to look collectively at the tracking of students who have utilized these supports to determine trends and outcomes across multiple interventions.

Process Mapping Code

The student experience/college process map above represents the current onboarding and advising process for new students like Holly, from their initial interest in the college to the end of their first term. The purple cards represent required parts of the process and the blue cards represent parts of the process that are encouraged but not required. The arrows represent relationships between parts of the process and the way that students like Holly can be referred to support programs for adult learners. The pink box at the top of the map represents faculty referrals to supports and represents a leverage point in connecting students to available supports.

Process Mapping Conclusion

The process mapping participants identified that while there are clear parts for each component of this process, or each department’s ownership in the process, the combined steps are not designed to work together seamlessly from a student’s point of view.

Individual departments or support areas do a good job of facilitating their portion of the process, however, to improve upon this process and to support helping students navigate enrollment through a successful 1st term, this process needs to be rethought and designed as a cohesive experience for adult learners.
HCC Fast Facts – Fall 2019
https://www.hcc.edu/about/facts-and-history/fast-facts

In review of HCC data, we were struck by the diversity of the student population. Over 40% of students identify with one or more racial and ethnic minority group, and more than 60% of enrolled students identify as female, while almost 60% attend college part-time. One could estimate based on national trends, that the large female student population includes student parents and students who assume primary care giving responsibilities inside the home, in addition to external paid employment.

When looking at fall-to-fall retention at HCC, adult students are retained at a lower rate than other students. Disaggregating deeper, adult Hispanic or Latino and Black or African American students, part-time students, non-Pell eligible, and fully online students are retained at an even lower rate.
The stakes are high for these students, a statistically significant population of HCC, in which their successful completion of educational goals is linked to their economic well-being and that of the communities in which they live.

As such, it is imperative that HCC understands the needs of these students and designs systemic supports that college faculty and staff can operationalize. While the examples in the process mapping description clearly note intentional institutional thinking as to the creation of programs, services, and supports, the college should review internal processes, policies, and practices through the lens of actual student personas, such as Holly. When design testing the current system against this typical student profile, HCC needs to explore whether it is equitable to ask students with limited time, experience, and financial resources to engage in a complicated onboarding process with limited interaction and a collection of disparate supports and services.

Apply the Design Thinking Process

As a foundational step to any improvement in academic, student supports or advising redesign, HCC should start with identifying student personas/profiles most representative of the student population you serve. Using these personas, HCC should map and understand how those students are currently experiencing the college. Teams should work together across all functional areas (direct and indirect student touch) to apply the SSIPP principles to design processes and supports that are student-centered. Approaches should be evaluated by all stakeholders, especially students, to gain feedback on the impact of the intended redesign.

This is a critical step in supporting the recommendations in this report. To do this well, HCC should develop a core group of faculty, staff, and leaders who are strong in the facilitation of the design thinking process. Ideally, members of this trained design group, would be embedded in all project teams throughout the college and serve as “equity anchors” to ensure any solutions are developed with the student at the center. While culture change can be a long process, it starts by building institutional habits that are consistently applied. Building collaborative teams that not only look at addressing symptoms with the college student experience but work to understand the current design and how it impacts students, cannot be an isolated or initiative driven exercise. It is the lens through which the college should evaluate what it is doing, how it is doing, why it is doing, and who is impacted.
EQUITY IN THE DESIGN THINKING PROCESS

**Change Level: Two and Three**

**Two** - Once a core group of HCC faculty and staff have been trained to facilitate this process, the ownership of cross-departmental and internal departmental solutions development can be operationalized and sustained at this level. Executive leadership will want to ensure that the college is building sustainable habits, however, no day to day support should be needed at maturity and scale.

**Three** - While department and unit leaders are central to the implementation and application of applying student-centered design, executive leadership will need to prioritize this institutional habit for sustainability. Developing a culture of design thinkers to work methodically through the process of identifying substantive approaches to improve the student experience, builds organizational capacity.
Recommendation One
Improving College Website and Campus Wayfinding

Website

College websites serve a critical function as not only a source of information for potential students, employees, grant and community partners, but also as a source of truth and documentation for the college community. When designed from a student-centric standpoint, they serve as a gateway to understanding and facilitating the successful completion of the matriculation process, as well as a resource to find information to identify the existence and location of services, supports, course information, policies, practices, engagement opportunities and community connections.

When evaluating the HCC website, we looked for ease of navigation, searchability of information, readability of content, communication for understanding, and actionability of student and college communication and engagement. The following information represents an audit of the college website, however, it is not intended to be exhaustive and is not intended to be an audit of accessibility for ADA compliance.

Our overarching evaluation of the website is that it is designed reflective of HCC’s organizational structure and is not designed intuitively for the students HCC serves. Information is located based on the offices that own those processes and requires students to understand not only the institutional structure but also the HCC language used to describe processes and programs. On many pages key information is located below the scroll line and this makes it easy for critical information to be missed by students who are trying to find information quickly, or perhaps navigating the website on their phone.

Ease of Navigation

- There is no tab for “students” at the top of the home page of HCC’s website that directs students to available supports. Support information available to students is often found at the end of a long click path.

For example, a student that has been out of school for a number of years and is interested in returning would need to know to navigate from the home page --> “courses and programs” --> “academic supports” --> “New Directions” in order to find the program that is specifically designed to help them succeed. For a student who may be either first generation or out of practice with higher education, this is not an intuitive click path and the student will need to know the name of the program designed to help them.
• Supports available to help adult learners are not all located in one place on the HCC website. The placement of the supports is based on information and organization that may not be understood by new students.

For example, Adult Education is located under courses and programs. New Directions, which is explicitly for adult learners, is not located under adult education and instead is located under academic programs and academic supports. While this makes sense because of the type of supports New Directions offers, new students will not have the nuanced information that will make these supports or programs easy to find.

Searchability of Information

• Keyword searches do not consistently take the user to the searched information on the website.

For example, when looking for the college fact book, we typed fact book into the search feature on the main page of the website and while a long list of offices and information appeared in the search window, it did not take us to the About Us page where the Fast Facts link is located. While the name was slightly different, students new to college may not know the exact name of college services and supports and the search feature should be tweaked to recognize more variations of related items to help redirect students to supports.

• Students need to know the name of the program that will serve them in order to find it easily on the website.

For example, the website makes it very clear who is served by each academic support program. However, an international student or a student transitioning from ESL will need to know to search for the Multicultural Academic Services (MAS) program to learn about supports available to them. Unless a student is referred specifically to that program, it may not be intuitive to them to search for that program by name.

Readability of Content

• Content found under critical student support services is written at a level that can be difficult to understand for first generation college students and students who may need ESL supports.

For example, financial aid is often an area of concern for students and often a point of frustration for practitioners who rely on students to follow lengthy and complicated
processes requiring strict compliance standards. To gage the readability of the content on the financial aid page, we selected content to drop in the Gunning Fog Index and found that content scored an 18.48 on the readability scale, meaning the content is written above a 12th grade level. While compliance is important, first-generation adult students and many other student groups would struggle with the complexity of the language used to describe a process that could be explained in plain language.

In the sample below, the references to federal processor and verification are not clearly explained for the demographic of students the college serves.

Incomplete Applications: If your application is selected for verification by the federal processor or the school, additional documentation is required, such as verification worksheets. The requested documents must be submitted to the Financial Aid Office within two (2) weeks of the date that you are notified of the need for this information. If we do not receive the documents within that time frame, we will consider the file incomplete and take no further action on the application while it remains in incomplete status. If the documents are submitted after the two-week period, we may take action on the application if federal and state rules allow us to do so. If corrections to the application are required after receipt of the requested documents, HCC will make the corrections on our computer system and submit the corrections to the federal processor.

Communication for Understanding

- Website links can take students to next steps that are not clearly defined or explained

For example, clicking the “Apply Now” button on the home page takes the potential student to the admissions page that has a picture of an HCC student and another “apply” action button. Students who are looking to apply to the college will naturally think that clicking that button is their next step and they are then directed to a log in for an application portal. However, all the information that can help them become a student, including the critical step of creating an account, is located below the scroll line and there is no indication that students should check there first before starting the application process.

Once a student begins the process to set up an account, there is language on that page that is not intuitive to inexperienced students. Terms like “anticipated entry term” and “academic program of interest” could be confusing to students. Instead, communicating with phrases like “when will you start classes at HCC” or “what would you like to study” may be simpler ways to communicate what HCC is asking for on that form. Finally, when using the “Apply Now” path to understand admissions processes, there is no information that explains the differences between an AA, AS, or certificate. Students who then proceed to “Apply” and start an application, are prompted to select a program without explanation of program differences. Asking students to select programs without adequate information can lead to unintended consequences such as frequent program changes early in the student journey.
Actionability of Engagement

- There are no chat features or options for scheduling advising, or support appointments, or directly communicating with college offices on the homepage of the website. Also, the call to action to “Apply Now” is buried midway down the home page and the button is the same color as the background of the page.

For example, students navigating the website homepage need to search for services, supports and program information by name to identify a phone number to call or office location to find. There is no “Chat Now,” “I Need Help,” “Advising Appointments,” or “Apply Now” call to action button above the scroll line on the main page of the website. There is a link for applying, but it is buried midway down the home page. When a student connects with the college via the homepage, there is no “easy” button for them to immediately connect to a person, chat bot, ask for help, or to schedule an appointment.

Examples of college websites:

**Broward College** ([https://www.broward.edu/](https://www.broward.edu/)) - highlights the use of the student tab and then direct navigation with easy to use links to student resources. The Broward website also demonstrates the easily accessible chat button that can help connect students to information and has a live chat capability.

**Lorain County Community College** ([https://www.lorainccc.edu/](https://www.lorainccc.edu/)) - has an easily accessible student resource tab at the top of the home page and with one click brings students to a page with academic, technical, financial, learning, career, and student supports easily accessible to students.

**Ozarks Technical College** ([https://www.otc.edu](https://www.otc.edu)) - demonstrates strategic use of the website to support self-advocacy and to self-identify the need for critical supports. OTC is a rural college with limited resources. See the “I need Help!” button top of page which take students to several options for engaging with college staff.

**St. John’s University** ([https://www.stjohns.edu/](https://www.stjohns.edu/)) - uncluttered and provides a home page link to a chat bot for help, call to action buttons for deposit, apply and find a program. Program information is well organized and explained with call to action buttons underneath program overviews. Apply takes students to a page that explains the value of applying.

**Kingsborough Community College**, ([https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/](https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/)) - example of clearly organized and communicated information once you select apply now.
Students are provided with foundational information, organized in a simplistic way to help students understand the process and their choices.

**Wayfinding and Access**

In addition to the navigation challenges identified above, one core component of our originally scheduled in person visit was to navigate the campus to identify the location of services and supports, and to get a better feel for the HCC student experience. Due to the COVID pandemic, we were unable to do an in person campus visit, however, we were able to discuss campus way finding with faculty and staff and to gain an orientation to the location of services and supports through campus maps and communications.

Core issues addressed in discussion with faculty and staff include the orientation of key offices and buildings on campus. With the addition of the new Campus Center, students who arrive via public transportation or who need to utilize campus parking are arriving at the back of the campus. While we understand there is discussion on addressing the lack of bus access to what is now the “front door” of the college, students utilizing public transportation do not currently arrive on campus in a convenient location to access needed supports or services. In our group discussions it was noted that perhaps as many as 1/3rd of your low-income students utilize public transportation to access campus.

In addition, it was identified that essential student onboarding needs are spread out throughout campus and not co-located in one “student hub.” A student who needs...
to complete several steps in their onboarding process, will have to complete some transactions at the Campus Center and then walk up the hill and many stairs to complete subsequent processes. If a student forgets a step or is missing information, a student could potentially shuttle back and forth between locations.

In addition, we learned from adult students that when they are on campus in the evening there are limited supports available, limited places to study and there are limited food options. This coupled with the campus orientation challenges presents a student-centered design opportunity. The co-location of services and supports in a comprehensive student center would be ideal, with satellite supports as needed in high traffic and conveniently located buildings, such as the library. During evening hours or peak registration times, the library could serve as a satellite student supports “help desk” to address core needs at the point of engagement without sending students across the campus to other offices.

To establish the correct locations and core satellite options, HCC should convene a design team to test these solutions through the eyes of your adult student personas.

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We recommend HCC convene a design team to utilize college student personas and walk through a mock enrollment and campus navigation process, assuming different student personas and attempting to complete the processes on campus as they are located.

In addition, we recommend HCC redesign the current website from a student-centered perspective. This process should also include student input with representation from a diverse student demographic profile.

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**Change Levels: Two and Three**

**Two** - Once executive leadership has ensured the prioritization of these projects, leadership of these efforts may be assumed by the marketing team and designated student services and academic leaders. The design teams for both recommendations should be cross-functional, and the student voice should be incorporated.

**Three** - The prioritization of a college website audit and the design thinking student persona strategy requires the express endorsement of executive leadership, as well as the prioritization and resource allocation for this work. Executive leadership will want to ensure teams are monitoring efforts and work towards continuous improvement of campus services and message sharing.
Recommendation Two
Comprehensive Adult Learner Support Program Development

As described in the process mapping discovery section, HCC has a variety of programs such as Transition to College and Career, New Directions, STRIVE, THRIVE, Academic ESL, Office for Students with Disabilities and Deaf Services, and Pathways, to help students from the start of their journey to completion. As noted, the process map demonstrates that faculty and staff identified clear connections between the programs, services, and supports, and recognized that a student like Holly may be in contact with several of these programs, services, and supports simultaneously or over the duration of their matriculation at HCC.

Integrate and Align Adult Learner Supports

To reduce the “information inoculation” experience of HCC adult learners and to scale the capacity of these programs that support adult students with intersecting needs, we recommend the formation of a comprehensive adult learner support program. This program would bring together all services and supports designed to support adult learners under one structure, with a comprehensive intake and tracking system for services, scaled capacity for in-office supports and extended service hours. In addition, this comprehensive program would simplify communication as to what the office does and who it serves.

By integrating and aligning the strengths of current small-scale programs and utilizing existing staffing, HCC can implement a reimagined adult learner experience. Current staff can work together in support of specialized needs such as veterans and adult women. By integrating and aligning the program structure, there would be no need to duplicate core support services, such as study areas, computers, distribution of resources and access to office locations. Reorganization of current structures will allow the college to move forward in designing the comprehensive program students need through the efficient use of space and existing staffing.

This recommendation specifically focuses on the integration and scaling of existing services and the merging of existing staffing under one comprehensive reimagined program. The holistic approach to student supports is based on intentional integration and student-centered design that centralizes services and creates workflows that allow students to only need to tell their story once. A team-based approach to this work centers on building HCC capacity to develop a system of care that can be scaled to support a greater number of adult students.
The ideal program would:

- Integrate and align existing resources to create a centralized, comprehensive adult learner experience.
- Create an experience where all adult learners know about and have access to the supports available to help them achieve their goals.
- Provide adult students flexible options for completing key college processes.
- Equitably serve all adult learners.
- Track the impact of supports and services on the adult learner experience and retention.
- Communicate effectively with students through all avenues and make it easy for students to self-advocate when they need support.
- Have a coordinated, collaborative set of workflows and processes that make helping adult learners across college offices/areas seamless.

Components of HCC Comprehensive Adult Learner Support Program:
As mentioned earlier in this report, HCC has identified the adult learner experience as a critical and priority area for improvement. The critical challenges to the current adult learner experience, include:

- There are a variety of disconnected support programs available to serve the HCC adult students.
- There is a significant percentage of adult students that are not being served by the supports available to them and students are not aware of the availability of the programs/services that can help them the most.
- Advising (Ed Planning) covers an overwhelming amount of information and is the last required touch before classes begin.
- There is no dedicated person to assist students until the advisor is assigned after classes begin.
- Faculty are not all familiar with the details of the support programs available to students and do not consistently report a high level of confidence in referring students appropriately.
- Support offices are distributed across campus and students must tell their story each time they seek help in a new office.
- The website is challenging for students who are looking for assistance.
- Institutional policies or practices that are not adult student-centric in design.

Need #1 – Supports proactively integrated and sustained throughout the adult learner’s journey

Supports should be offered to students as part of their experience before they struggle. HCC students participating in adult support programs such as New Directions reported having an excellent experience that added value to their time at HCC. However, they also reported finding these programs by chance and many wished they had found the supports sooner.

Example: St. Petersburg College has created a student journey map that clearly defines the student supports that are critical to success at a that point in the student journey. These supports can be offered to students with an intentionality that recognizes the cadence of the academic journey and communicated proactively in a student friendly visual that easily conveys the alignment of the support with the academic progress.
Need #2 – A comprehensive and coordinated approach to student support that involves both staff and faculty.

Holistic student supports is defined as the cohesive suite of services that help students address the academic and non-academic factors vital to retention and completion. Non-cognitive needs are not left outside the classroom door and as such faculty need to be well equipped to help support students. Students spend more time in the classroom than anywhere else on campus and it is often faculty who see the first signs of student struggle. It is critical that both full and part-time faculty are prepared to effectively refer a student to supports.

When speaking to faculty on campus there was not a consistent, or high level of confidence about referring students to supports. A few members of the faculty reported learning about the support programs during their new faculty orientation but acknowledged they could use additional training as a refresher. Some reported developing expertise over the course of years and others noted the loss of counselors who had been helpful to faculty in this capacity in the past. In addition to colleague relationships and coordinated workflows, technology can be helpful to give faculty the capacity to outreach on behalf of students. See recommendation #4 for more details.
Need #3 - Aligning Support to Student Needs

Adult students enter HCC from many different places. After students apply, they may be referred to programs that serve their specific needs. However, not all adult students have an onboarding experience that connects them to supports that are dedicated specifically to their success. The HCC adult learner is likely to be female, Latinx, between 25-34 years old, degree-seeking, part-time, enrolled in at least one online course, and may be enrolled in developmental education. In addition, the American Council on Education states that post-traditional learners are also the primary wage earners for their families, combine work and learning at the same time, pursue knowledge, skills and credentials with labor market value, and seek academic and career advising to navigate their path to completion.

When interviewing HSS adult students, they noted their unmet needs on campus included childcare, flexible course offerings, and availability of supports during off hours and weekends. The childcare need is especially concerning as it will disproportionately impact HCC’s adult female students as they pursue their goals.

Connecting adult students to supports is critical to their success yet many of the students we spoke with were not aware of the wealth of resources available to them. Proactive structures and processes can help make this seamless for students. For example, a non-cognitive intake assessment can personalize and connect students to the supports that will help them most (click INTAKE SURVEY for example). Additionally, HCC could strategically use their website to help adult students find information about or self-identify the need for the critical supports available to help them progress and meet their goals.

Need #4 - Assess and scale boutique student support programs to all adult learners.

ATD recognizes that boutique programs that serve small populations of learners do not create lasting transformative change at institutions. While HCC has programs that are dedicated to adult students, these programs only serve a small percentage of the HCC adult student population.

For example, New Directions serves approximately 8-10% of HCC’s total adult student population and roughly about 1% of each new incoming class. Moving the needle on success for adult learners will require that the benefits of programs such as New Directions are moved to scale.
Assessment should dig deeper into the disaggregated data of HCC’s adult students and ensure that all students are being served equitably. It was clear from the data provided that HCC’s adult students lag behind all students when looking at fall-to-fall retention. However, if you dig deeper into the disaggregation of the New Horizon data points, minority students, especially Hispanic or Latino and Black or African American students, students enrolled fully online, non-Pell eligible, and non-degree seeking students are retained at an even lower rate.

Since the college does not have the capacity to offer high touch support to all HCC adult students, the college should thoroughly assess what aspects of the program have the most impact and prioritize scaling those areas. Adult students interviewed during this process, repeatedly mentioned how important the personal connections with program support staff was to them. Establishing personal relationships and having a single point of contact was highly valued by the students and increased their sense of belonging. To identify the aspects of the programs most beneficial to students, HCC should include a diverse representation of student voices that have participated in these programs, coupled with data from program outcomes to tell a more complete story as to high impact practices that could be scaled.

There is absolutely no substitute for the student voice during both design and assessment. From the student we can learn what encourages them to engage (or not) with our supports, what aspect of the supports adds value to their student experience, the barriers of the designed processes, and what helped them persist to achieve their goals. We should actively seek student input to create impactful designs and to avoid unintended consequences.

We recommend HCC form a comprehensive adult learner support program, bringing together all services and supports designed for adult learners under one structure, with a comprehensive intake and tracking system for services, scaled capacity for in office supports and extended service hours.
Change Levels: Two and Three

**Two** - The successful operation of a comprehensive center will hinge on the daily leadership of this collaborative venture. Once organizational structure allows for the operational alignment of such a center, service leaders should be charged with ensuring the center goals are met, and specialized supports reach adult learners.

**Three** - The development of a comprehensive adult learner support program or any substantive changes to the current structure of supports will require executive level leadership. Structural changes will be needed for co-location of services, organizational reporting changes, and establishing institutional processes and policies. In addition, technology support should be prioritized as a critical component to addressing current system gaps and providing the infrastructure for scalable supports.
Recommendation Three
Adopting data-informed decision making at the service delivery, program, and institutional level

As identified in previous sections of this report, making data-informed decisions is an essential component of the development and sustainability of high impact practices and student interventions. This includes both quantitative and qualitative data that can be gathered from existing college resources such as institutional data, CCSSE and SENSE data, and data from external sources such as from the RealCollege Hope Lab Survey to learn about student attributes, attitudes, and program assessment.

During discussions with faculty and staff, it was clear that while they had access to a limited number of academic and support program metrics and full access to institutional level data, this data was primarily comprised of lagging indicators which focused on the outcomes of students at the conclusion of academic terms. However, faculty and staff did not have systems in place to track implementation metrics as they relate to leading indicators to make more data informed decisions during the student progression points. Meaning, once a student has failed a course, they would have access to a report to identify who earned a DFW, but would not have access to data that showed them if a student stopped attending classes or did not complete orientation or some other key milestone in the student experience at which point they could outreach and intervene to prevent a student from failing.

If the goal is to improve the fall-to-fall retention rates for adult students at HCC, what indicators can be measured that will inform if the student is on track? Are there fall and spring semester milestones that can be tracked as leading indicators of successful retention to the following fall?

Careful thought and planning should be given to identifying leading indicators that may allow a college department or student service point team to identify measurable changes that inform whether or not the team is on the right path in the daily implementation of the work, long before lagging indicators change.

ATD has created a resource that provides suggestions for both leading and lagging indicators that can help track implementation and impact of holistic student supports. (click HSS METRICS for full resource)
Change Levels: Two and Three

**Two** - While executive leadership will need to embed data-informed decision making into college operations, success hinges on the adoption of this management approach by service and program leaders. Adopting new operational practices is essential for cultural change.

**Three** - The prioritization of data-informed decision at the point of service and programmatic delivery will require intentional integration into college decision making. By embedding this practice into daily operations, it will more likely establish a foundation in institutional culture.

We recommend HCC establish a culture of data-informed decision making at the point of service and programmatic delivery through the intentional identification of service and programmatic leading indicators that are integrated into the decision-making processes of service and program leaders.
Recommendation Four
Implementing technology and communication systems in support of student communication and coordination of service delivery

During the facilitation of focus groups, mapping exercises, and discussion of policy and practices, communication was a recurring theme. As we discussed communication with faculty and staff, it was clear that many participants felt they did not have the information or the capacity to effectively communicate with students and with each other. We categorized the underlying issues that were related to “communication.”

They are:

**Education/Information** - Need for more communication around college process, function, decisions, services, and supports to ensure faculty and staff have the information they need to do their jobs, explain information to students, and improve their own knowledge, skills, and abilities. This is especially important to keep faculty and staff informed of the supports available to students and making it easy to connect students to critical supports.

**Collaboration/Breaking Down Silos** - Need for deliberate processes and practices that encourage collaborative behaviors and working teams to ensure faculty and staff are able to understand and voice challenges, and identify opportunities for their internal work, as well as potential student impact that may not be understood or considered when decisions are made in departmental or unit silos that will ultimately impact the lifecycle of the student.

**Technology** - Need for software systems to enable streamlined internal communication, documentation, note sharing, faculty student referrals and requests for intervention support, creating processes that improve faculty and staff effectiveness and ability to support retention. This is especially important for supporting students with needs that fall outside of individual faculty and staff areas of expertise in a timely and intentional fashion.

**Access** - Need to ensure faculty and staff have access to platforms/systems and content that contains relevant student information to enable proactive engagement, outreach, case management, and functional process completion for core systems that are used in the student experience and college processes. This is especially important as it relates to roles and responsibilities across departments, such as the function of advising and the many levels of access people who provide student advising have to existing platforms, degree auditing software, LMS and SIS systems.
**Communication to Students** – Need to ensure that students are not inundated with conflicting messages and calls to action that cause “overcommunication paralysis” by well-intentioned departments and units who may not understand the impact overcommunication has on student actions, also need to ensure the college community takes into account the diversity of the student body and communicates for understanding, not just the dissemination of factual information.

**Examples of college approaches**

The college examples below represent approaches to scaling communication strategies that include both high-tech and low-tech options. These institutions leveraged technology as a tool to scale intentional and collaborative workflows to improve connection and delivery of supports to students.

**Northeast Wisconsin Technical College:** NWTC is an example of a college that has focused on institutional collaboration and process improvement as the foundation for their student connections and communication. Through a mix of improving intake, adopting an alert system, emphasis on campus climate and culture, and data driven decision making, the college utilizes a high-tech student success platform to scale internal and student facing communication.

**Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College:** FDLTCC created a low-tech, homegrown early alert system using shared Excel spreadsheets to allow easy exchange of information between academics and student affairs. This approach works well due to their size and high rate of user adoption from all stakeholders.

**Northeast State Community College:** Northeast State developed a creative, low-tech, low cost way to help connect students to supports quickly using a “prescription pad” model. This referral approach is used by support staff to prevent student confusion and immediately connect students to a specific individual who can provide the support they need.

As HCC considers how to improve shared communication, attention should be focused on both communication practices and communication technologies. While technologies are very useful in the deployment of information for both internal and external stakeholders, technology implementation without defined processes or streamlined workflows does not yield high user adoption. Purchasing vendor solutions can be costly; and ultimately, vendors need to know “how the college works” to best customize features. Developing and maintaining a homegrown system that coordinates and aligns with current institutional systems may provide the most cost-effective way to address needs and ensure the end product works for the college. However, purchasing a stand-alone system may save time and energy on development and maintenance.
We recommend HCC evaluate communication and technology systems to determine if the current systems and software options support a holistic approach to improved workflows, internal communication, problem solving, and timely interventions.

In addition, we recommend HCC review access to systems and communications to identify where faculty and staff lack access to critical information that will enable them to provide comprehensive services and supports for students.

Change Levels: Two and Three

**Two** - While executive leaders will need to prioritize this work as critical to systems improvement, department and operational units will need to establish workflows and behaviors that support coordination and information sharing.

**Three** - The prioritization and strategic alignment of college-wide supports and processes requires executive level endorsement. Communication challenges impede the college’s ability to function at high capacity. Executive leadership will need to prioritize this as foundational work to improve systems and processes across the institution and support improved outcomes.
Recommendation Five
Implementing flexible parts-of-term course schedules, and adult student-centered academic policies

Roughly 45% of HCC adult students are enrolled part-time and many take courses in the evening or online. Adopting student-centric policies and practices that account for the busy life of the adult learner will help them succeed. For example, faculty and staff noted that adult students expressed interest in evening and online courses; however, those options were not fully available across academic programs making it difficult for adult students to register for a part-time or accelerated scheduled to meet their needs and to support program completion in a timely manner. In addition, the limited public transportation hours made it difficult for students using the bus system to enroll in evening courses due to the limited evening bus options.

The current limited options for adult students may be contributing to inequities in program choice and completion. As an example, when evening program options are limited, students can be forced into online classes where persistence is not as high as seated courses. Ensuring part-time adult students can continue enrollment and progress toward their academic goals requires flexible course offerings in multiple modalities that account for when and how courses are offered. To support students holistically, deep analysis of how students’ progress through academic programs is imperative. This analysis is effective in identifying structural and programmatic barriers that impede academic momentum and in identifying opportunities that accelerate momentum to timely completion.

One such area for critical analysis is the term length of courses. The term length of courses should be considered to allow adult students more options in designing a schedule that keeps them continuously enrolled and provides the opportunity to focus on fewer courses at a time. Focus group participants identified maintaining enrollment and focus for 16-week courses as a barrier for adult students and spoke to an interest in exploring course length options. Offering multiple parts-of-term course formats can help part-time students stay continuously enrolled, enable them to achieve early momentum metrics, and improve course success rates.

Specifically, flexible parts-of-term course schedules:
- allow students to focus on fewer courses at one time
- provide students more on and off ramps, which allow students to start when they arrive and to be on time for the next start
- prevent students from losing time and credit should they need to stop out in times of disruption
- allow students to enroll part-time and complete 30 credits over a year if they can remain continuously enrolled
Developing flexible parts-of-term course schedules and adult student-centered academic policies is whole college work that requires a shift in the mental models around offering courses. Colleges undertaking this work should commit to an intentional planning period that focuses on laying the foundation for the shift, a focus on leading the work at all levels of the college, comprehensive communication planning, and plans for engaging all stakeholders in the work.

Examples of college approaches:

**Amarillo College:** AC committed to flexible parts-of-term schedules to improve student success, reduce the number of students that withdraw from courses, and to improve persistence to completion. Their approach involved converting the top 10 enrolled courses and then the top 26 enrolled courses which covered 90% of student enrollment at the college.

**Waukesha County Technical College:** WCTC transitioned their courses to better serve their part-time students who take an average of six credits per semester, which. Part-time students are now better able to achieve 30 credit hours over fall, spring and summer with this new academic course format.

**Chief Dull Knife Tribal College:** CDK faculty championed the transition to shorter terms to reduce the number of students who withdraw, improve course success, and reduce time to degree. They leveraged the student voice and were able to monitor and evolve the work over each semester to a format that served the students and the institution well.

A core tenant of a holistic model is the integration of academic and student supports. This includes looking at common areas of student needs such as the cost of education, access to basic needs, and other needs that may impact classroom performance and academic success. Academic policies should be aligned with supporting a holistic approach. For example, open educational resources can bring down the costs of attendance and improve access to course materials. In addition, common course requirements can ensure students have the supplies and materials required to be seat ready on the first day. This is also beneficial in ensuring your part-time faculty are prepared for students on the first day.
Finally, given the diversity of the adult student population and the desire to close equity gaps, HCC should look at classroom policies and practices (attendance, disciplinary, culturally responsive teaching, etc.) and determine if adult learners are at all penalized for circumstances outside their control, such as missing a class due to having a sick child or a work schedule change. It would be good practice to review all policies to determine if there are student groups who are disproportionately impacted.

We recommend developing a faculty led adult learner work group to explore pedagogical practices and academic structures that better support adult student academic momentum. This group should provide a recommendation for addressing course schedules, classroom policies, culturally responsive practices, multiple start dates, and instructional design and course delivery modalities.

Change Levels: Two and Three

**Two** - While executive leadership needs to endorse and support any changes to academic policy and course scheduling, the success of this work hinges on the faculty leadership. Success depends on faculty having a deeper understanding of policies, practices and pedagogy. To facilitate equitable outcomes for all students.

**Three** - The prioritization and strategic alignment of academic policies, practices and pedagogy impact the mission and operation of the college. Executive leadership will need to prioritize the professional development of faculty, data informed decision making, and equity in support of comprehensive culture change.
**Recommendation Summary**

Knowing the abovementioned recommendations will take time to explore and plan, we have identified actionable steps you can take immediately.

Things that HCC can do right now:

- Re-examine retention data for adult students and look for equity gaps.
- Establish a method to track support utilization of support services used by adult learners.
- Improve the website to be more adult-learner friendly. The current “ask a question” functionality is a good start to giving students the ability to self-advocate.
- Create assessment plans for current student support programs.

Things that HCC should plan for future work:

- Explore technology to assist with internal communication and workflow management.
- Plan to identify and scale high impact practices to all adult learners.
- Explore the structural organization and creation of support roles on campus to support adult learners.
- Create a comprehensive plan to assess the impact of all supports on adult learners.

To improve the adult student experience at HCC, the following recommendations have been described in detail in this report.

1. Improving College Website and Wayfinding
2. Developing a Comprehensive Adult Learner Support Program
3. Adopting data-informed decision making at the service delivery, program, and institutional level
4. Implementing technology and communication systems in support of student communication and coordination of service delivery
5. Implementing flexible parts-of-term course schedules, and adult student-centered academic policies
Putting It All Together
What Happens Next

The recommendations included in this report are intentionally contextualized around HSS and adult learner needs. We recognize the sense of urgency at HCC to address desired improvements in support of improved student retention and completion. As such, it’s important to understand this report as a “both/and approach.” HCC needs to begin moving forward in support of addressing parts and components of holistic student supports for adult learners, while establishing clear alignment of the overarching student success portfolio, related programs, college goals, and organizational culture to help actualize the desired changes. The goal for HCC is sustainable change and this goal can only be realized when planning, evaluating, and providing structural and process supports for the whole, while working towards incremental changes.

In addition, HCC has focused part of their institutional strategy on being recognized as an Adult Learner Focused Institution. Washington Monthly in conjunction with CAEL recognizes colleges that have focused their design specifically for the adult learner. Striving for this award will require HCC to become a college that creates momentum for adult students by designing systems, structures, and processes that accommodate the adult learner. Achievement of this award will require the college to implement many of the changes to structures and processes that we have recommended in our report. The criteria for achieving the recommendations include offering flexibility in scheduling courses, offering a range of career focused options, offering supports and services outside of banking hours, and making it possible for part-time students to succeed after graduating. The link to the community college rankings for 2019 and the criteria that are important to being recognized as a best 2-year college for adult learners can be found here. We believe that working towards these goals has great value for the students HCC serves, and HCC should work to be recognized for such dedication.

A formal debrief of this report will be scheduled to discuss the recommendations in detail. We look forward to answering any questions and supporting the planning, process development, and implementation of adopted recommendations.
Appendix

A. Opportunity Assessment Agenda
B. HCC Process Map
C. SPC Pathways Map
D. HSS Metrics