

HCC Gateway to College program earns national nods for excellence

HOLYOKE – For the third consecutive year – and sixth time in the past nine – the Gateway to College program at Holyoke Community College has received a national excellence award from its parent network, Achieving the Dream.

Achieving the Dream presents excellence awards to its Gateway affiliates when those programs meet or exceed four benchmark criteria: grade point average, retention (one-year persistence and two-year persistence rates), and graduation rate.

The Gateway to College program at HCC has won one or more benchmark awards for the last 10 years, and the excellence award in 2016, 2017, 2020, 2022, 2024, and 2025.

Through Gateway to College, students who have dropped out of high school, or are at risk for dropping out, complete their high school diplomas in college-based programs while



Gateway to College Learning Specialist Shannon Glenn, left, and Program Director Vivian Ostrowski hold a 2025 excellence award the program received from its parent network, Achieving the Dream.

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simultaneously earning credits toward a college certificate or degree.

HCC has hosted a Gateway to College program since 2008. The program enrolled 144 students during

the academic year when they received the award.

“We earned this award because young people who disconnected from traditional education were willing to trust us and give school

another chance, and our amazing instructors and staff were patient and flexible and willing to give some grace as our young people navigated really challenging lives,” said Vivian Ostrowski,

HCC’s Gateway to College program director. “We now have 662 high school graduates from 25 school districts, and we hope that our community is stronger and kinder because of those grads and the hope and investment they bring.”

During the assessment year (2024-2025), students entered Gateway with an average GPA of 1.57, compared to a network average of 1.89, and finished their first term with an average GPA of 2.89, compared to a national average of 2.55.

The one-year persistence rate at HCC was 94 percent, compared to a 63 percent network average; two-year persistence at HCC was 88 percent, compared to a national average of 63.

HCC’s three-year graduation rate was 84 percent, compared to a national Gateway average of 65.

“Gateway to College programs provide a critical second chance for vulnerable high school students and

a powerful testament to the importance of wraparound support services and creating a sense of belonging in college,” said Emily Froimson, executive vice president of Achieving the Dream. “Nearly 75 percent of program graduates nationwide continue their postsecondary education.”

At the most recent HCC Gateway to College graduation in June, 47 students earned their high school diplomas from nine different communities: Chicopee, Easthampton, Holyoke, Ludlow, Northampton, Palmer, Springfield, West Springfield, and Westfield. Collectively, they finished Gateway with an average GPA of 3.1 and collected 398 college credits. Thirty-five of them are continuing on in college, most of them at HCC.

“Our graduates have earned more than 100 college degrees, with many more in progress,” Ostrowski said.