



Dallas College: The Barrier-Busting Business

Dallas College Chancellor Justin Lonon is very clear about his college's role in students' lives. "We are a public institution to do the public good, and there's a lot of good that needs to be done," he says. "So the role of Dallas College is to be in the barrier-busting business."

Dallas College is intently focused on removing the barriers that stand between students and success. It is not enough to offer a high-quality, affordable instructional experience if life issues are going to disrupt learning.

Saving Students Money

Dallas College's size gives it opportunities to negotiate partnerships and lower the costs of materials and services. As a result, tuition includes textbooks and learning materials so students save hundreds of dollars, and it is easier for them to have their textbooks on day one of classes. In addition, every enrolled student — even if they are taking just one \$79 credit hour — receives a free Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) pass. The college also has an emergency aid fund, which covers unexpected needs, including transportation.

"We aren't going to pat ourselves on the back about the DART pass because DART is not the answer for every student in every part of the county," Lonon says. "And when students don't have reliable transportation, there is a cascade effect. They can't get to class. They can't get to work. They can't get their kid to child care. Our emergency aid can literally get them back on the road to success."

Over the past four years, Dallas College provided students with \$13.6 million in emergency aid related to transportation. This figure includes Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) dollars. The college also used \$82.9 million of HEERF funds to assist students with resources connected to child care, food, housing, learning materials, and health needs.



Providing a Range of Services

Dallas College provides comprehensive, strategic support and services. For example, the college offers:

- Food pantries in partnership with the North Texas Food Bank.
- Clothing closets in partnership with local retailers.
- The Bezos Academy, which provides Montessori school and child care services, at two of the college's seven campuses, with a third location to open in the future.
- Drop-in child care at the YMCA for students at the downtown campus.
- Mental health care on campus in partnership with Metro Care Services.

In addition, Parkland Hospital plans to open community clinics at two Dallas College campuses so students will have easy access to quality, affordable health care.

Listening to Students, Engaging Faculty, and Building a Team of Success Coaches

Dallas College developed these services as the result of listening to students.

“We are very intentional about understanding our students’ needs,” Lonon says. “And we continue to listen. For example, we recently surveyed our students and learned that many of them did not know that child care is available. So we never think that we’ve solved a particular problem. We know the work is ongoing.”

The work also includes engaging faculty members in conversations about what student success really is and who is responsible for it.

“Faculty members were focused on whether their students earned an A, B, or C, so we have worked to shine the spotlight on data showing the challenges students have outside the classroom,” Lonon says. “That way, we all can better understand the barriers, be aware of the barriers, and be intentional about removing them.”

Dallas College also created additional student success coach positions. “We took the old advising model and put it on steroids. We doubled the number of success coach positions and doubled the salary they got paid,” Lonon explains. “The coaches guide and support students, helping with both academic issues and the life challenges that can take students off track and disrupt their education.”



The college is seeing — and measuring — the impact of this work. For example, students who interact with a success coach are more likely to persist. Fall-to-spring persistence rates are 80 percent for students who engage with a coach compared to 64 percent for students who do not. Fall-to-fall persistence is 64 percent for students who engage with a coach and 50 percent for those who do not.

TSC Helps Change Norms

“Our college has a long history as the Dallas County Community College District, and we have reinvented ourselves as Dallas College,” Lonon says. “To do that, you have to have the will to challenge some norms, and data is the best way to do that because it shows where the successes are and where the gaps are.”

He continues, “The Texas Success Center (TSC) has helped us focus and to use the data to ensure that we’re building pathways in a way that makes sense.”

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