

EDUCATION

LOCAL COLLEGES IN THE NEWS

HCC Gateway to College Program Earns National Award

HOLYOKE - Gateway to College at Holyoke Community College, an alternative high school program for dropouts and students at risk for dropping out, has been recognized with a national award for its outstanding graduation rate.

The award for Graduation Achievement was presented to HCC Gateway staff in June at Achieving the Dream's K-12 Partnerships Institute in Portland, Oregon. Achieving the Dream oversees the national Gateway to College network.

The award recognizes participating Achieving the Dream institutions that exceed the graduation benchmark of 50 percent established by the Gateway to College national network. HCC's three-year graduation rate was 88 percent (2019-2021). The network average was 68 percent.

"Despite the obvious struggles of the past two years, you and your colleagues across the Gateway network have persistently done everything you can for your students," Stephanie Davalos, director of K-12 Partnerships for Achieving the Dream, wrote in a congratulatory message to Vivian Ostrowski, HCC's Gateway to College director.



Gateway to College director Vivian Ostrowski, center, holds the national award for Graduation Achievement from Achieving the Dream, alongside Gateway's former special programs coordinator Julissa Colon (now director of HCC's El Centro program), left, and Shannon Glenn, Gateway's resource specialist.

"HCC's graduation rate at 88 percent is well beyond your long-strived-for 80 percent goal. I am thrilled," Davalos said. "You and your team are leading the way for our network and our field. Our network's continued improvement is due to exemplary programs like yours and your outcomes

will have an impact well beyond your community. We know these student outcomes are the product of the culture of relentless kindness, constant reflection, program improvement, and a tremendous amount of hard work and care."

Gateway to College is an alterna-

tive high school program that offers dropouts and struggling teenagers a chance to earn their high school diplomas through dual enrollment by taking college classes. Gateway students also collect transferable college credits they can apply toward a college certificate or degree.

HCC has hosted a Gateway program since 2008. Most of HCC's Gateway students come from Holyoke and Springfield.

Graduation Achievement is one of the principal benchmarks used to evaluate the success of Gateway programs.

"Given that students come to us so disengaged from school, an 88 percent graduation rate is a ridiculously amazing number," Ostrowski said.

Since 2008, nearly 500 students have earned their high school diplomas through HCC's Gateway to College program, which has received the national award for Graduation Achievement multiple times in past years along with Gateway national's Program Excellence Award in 2016 and 2017.

"Your work is changing lives and we are proud to learn from you and hold your program up as an example for educators across the country," Davalos said. ■