



# The Baldrige Journey in Education

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Fourteen years is a long time to be on a journey. That is how long Howard Community College (HCC) was on its Baldrige journey before winning the 2019 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. We had just completed our third consecutive site visit, and I was awaiting news of our status while traveling in Portugal. With the call taking longer than I had anticipated, I assumed I would hear from Bob Fangmeyer, director of the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, that we were not a winner.

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I was, however, certain that the college was doing its best to improve in our metrics, thanks to the dedicated faculty and staff working every day to meet the college's mission of “providing pathways to success.” At the site visit, the board of trustees, faculty, and staff were crystal clear in communicating our core competencies, mission, vision, values, strategic goals, and most importantly, results, the work that goes into having a top-notch organization. As I sat in a restaurant, I received a call asking me to stand by for Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross. When I heard congratulations from the Secretary, it was one of the most thrilling moments in my professional career.

HCC is an open-access, public community college offering associate degrees, certificates, and workforce development training and continuing education classes that help students prepare for careers or transfer to four-year institutions. With over 2,700 employees, the college educates more than 26,000 students annually.

When the global pandemic struck in March 2019, the college converted its mainly face-to-face instruction and services to primarily remote classes within two and a half weeks. Because we had been operating for well over a decade using the Baldrige framework, the shift was successfully completed. It was a difficult pivot in operations, and yet we found a new way of doing business and measuring the impact on our students and employees. We have kept in constant communication with faculty and staff to ensure we are planning in a way that students will reach their educational goals.

Some highlights that contributed to HCC winning the Baldrige award are our efforts to consistently benchmark results and outperform local and national comparators for associate degree and certificate attainment by more than 200 percent. HCC tripled its graduation rates for Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino first-time-to-college students within two years of entry. The graduation placement rate for health sciences students is 100 percent for seven out of eight of HCC's health sciences programs. And, HCC's full-time equivalent enrollment growth, which impacts state funding of the college, is the best in the state over the last ten years.

Supporting its strategic goal of student success, HCC deploys numerous methods to listen and interact with students. The national Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) indicates that HCC's overall ratings of students' educational experience and perception of college support are better than its large community college comparators, as well as the national CCSSE ratings. These ratings have continued to improve over the last five years.

Senior leaders create an environment to achieve the college's mission, engage the workforce, and cultivate organizational and individual learning by aligning workforce plans to departmental action plans to core institutional goals and objectives. They encourage employees to participate in plan-do-check-act improvement projects that are vetted by applying



*With several members of our Board of Trustees, celebrating our receiving the 2019 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.*

intelligent risk taking. Progress on achievement of institutional objectives is shared across the organization and with the Board of Trustees through reporting of key performance indicators.

HCC has been named a “Great College to Work For” for 12 consecutive years in an extensive workplace survey by ModernThink and recognized in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the top national higher education publication. Our community college is the only one in the United States to have achieved this record status. The college serves a majority minority population, reflecting the demographics of Howard County’s rich diversity. The college’s efforts to increase diversity among employees is reflective of the increasing number of diverse faculty, with full-time faculty at over 28 percent and administrative/professional staff over 31 percent, both the highest figures since records have been kept.

HCC fosters a high degree of stakeholder involvement in its strategic planning process. Every five years, it holds its Commission on the Future, which includes county leaders to help the college identify community needs and recommend potential strategic initiatives. Through a process of learning and improving over a six-year period, the college reduced its number of strategic objectives by more than half and the number of action plans by two-thirds. These actions helped to strengthen the alignment of contributing work group plans to those objectives, resulting in a 100 percent completion rate for strategic objectives for fiscal years 2016 through 2019. For example, focused objectives

have resulted in an improved student graduation-transfer rate performance after four years of 55 percent and increased percentage of developmental completers (students who entered HCC needing at least one developmental education course and became college ready) of 45 percent. The following results reflect our focus on student success:

- HCC outperformed its peer community colleges with a more than 100 percent growth rate for associate degrees awarded for over 10 years.
- Transfer-associated degrees have increased more than 181 percent from its 2007 baseline year.
- Career associate degrees at HCC have increased 186 percent from 2007 to 2019.
- Associate degree graduates in Howard County earn more than someone with a high school diploma or GED by more than \$428,400 in a lifetime.

Howard Community College has much to be proud of since winning the 2019 Baldrige award. While the global pandemic meant that the college could not participate in the 2020 Quest for Excellence conference, we have been invited to share our Baldrige journey virtually across the nation in 2021. As college president, my admiration for our trustees and employees has only grown as they have shown their dedication to our students during very challenging times.

“Providing pathways to success” has undergirded all our efforts as we move forward on our continuous quality journey.