



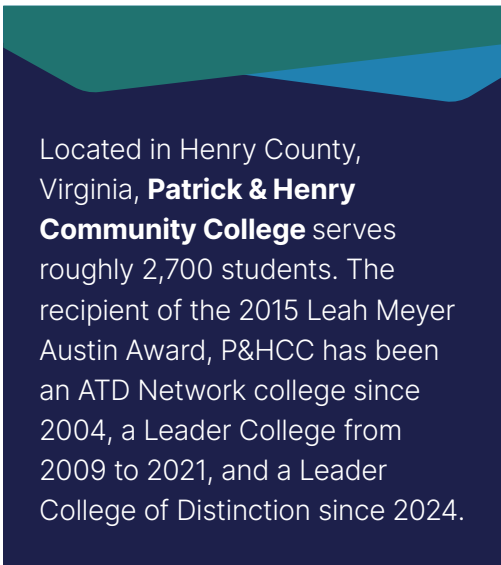
PATRICK & HENRY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Driving New Outreach to Changing Populations

Located in rural Southside Virginia, Patrick & Henry Community College (P&HCC) is using ATD's Community Vibrancy Framework for transformation to navigate two dramatic shifts in its service area — one demographic, the other economic.

The college's leaders have used the framework to rethink how P&HCC can advance upward mobility by engaging its community's rapidly growing Hispanic population and the nearly half of all adults in its service area who are not formally engaged in the workforce. Dr. Greg Hodges, president of P&HCC, says these shifts will "expand our lens of economic mobility, economic viability, and the work we have to do in the community accordingly."





Located in Henry County, Virginia, **Patrick & Henry Community College** serves roughly 2,700 students. The recipient of the 2015 Leah Meyer Austin Award, P&HCC has been an ATD Network college since 2004, a Leader College from 2009 to 2021, and a Leader College of Distinction since 2024.

A Rapidly Changing Population

For the past two decades, P&HCC has focused its outreach on the Black population within its service area, but its work with ATD's Community Vibrancy Initiative added urgency to fast-changing demographic shifts.

"We had been looking at data that suggested it, but our work with community vibrancy strengthened our realization that our community is quickly evolving, and [with it] the college is becoming a Hispanic-Serving Institution," Dr. Hodges says. "We knew pre-COVID it was changing, but it changed much more rapidly than what we anticipated just three years ago."

The Hispanic population on P&HCC's campus grew from 3% to 12% in the past three years, but additional community data

surfaced during the community vibrancy work suggested the shift will become even more dramatic in the years to come.

"We were able to look at the fact that sitting in the kindergarten and first grade classes in the largest part of our service region, one out of five students is of Hispanic descent," Dr. Hodges says. "That allowed us to really put teeth to the fact that this is reflective of our community."

Targeting Disengaged Adults and Rethinking Upward Mobility

Community vibrancy data also prompted college leaders to rethink upward mobility in the face of the region's changing economy. The college's service area had been devastated by the departure of the textile and furniture industries in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when unemployment peaked at 25% and remained above 15% for more than a decade, which resulted in regional population outmigration. More recently, an economic renaissance has resulted in the region's lowest unemployment rates in decades as its historic manufacturing base evolved into "clean, lean, and automated manufacturing," Dr. Hodges says.

The community vibrancy data uncovered through the curriculum's data workbooks reinforced growing challenges amid the brightening outlook. Starting early in the decade, Dr. Hodges and his team began paying closer attention to labor force participation or the percentage of 18-to-64-year-olds not in the traditional workforce. While that includes people working in the informal economy and in gig jobs, the region's employment engagement rate had fallen to between 55% and 60%, "meaning that 40% to 45% of eligible workers were not showing up on payrolls anywhere," Dr. Hodges says. "For our community, that was higher than what we were comfortable with. So this is a new population that we're trying to reach."

Changing Our Outreach

To target both populations, P&HCC leadership is taking intentional steps to change "how we market what we do and our outreach," Dr. Hodges says.

To better target the emerging Hispanic population, the college is deepening its partnerships with community-based organizations. For example, college leaders invited the Southern Virginia Latino Association to host its annual festival on campus, which brought 1,000 people to the college. "That probably was the first time many stepped foot on our campus," Dr. Hodges says. "That was very deliberate and came out of the community vibrancy work."

In similar fashion, the college has leaned more heavily on existing partnerships with the faith-based community to reach adults not engaged in the workforce. “Oftentimes, our faith-based leaders can penetrate these communities in ways that we cannot,” Dr. Hodges says. For example, the college offers work skills training for participants in a ministry-based addiction recovery organization. It has also purchased rights to an email listserv run by a Black minister and community leader who does entrepreneurial training “so we would get into that community,” Dr. Hodges says.

These new connections are allowing P&HCC to target disengaged adults with what Dr. Hodges calls the “J-O-B degree.” As part of Virginia’s FastForward initiative, the college offers short-term programs connected to high-demand fields, allowing students to find jobs in six months or less, while ensuring that pathways exist for them to return for additional education, credentials, and degrees.

Keeping Workers in the Community

P&HCC leaders are now exploring ways to target another group, that, if tapped, could dramatically benefit the community’s overall vitality. More than 20% of the region’s population drives across the state line to North Carolina for work, according to Dr. Hodges, who says the college is “figuring out ways to incentivize them to stay.”

“They already live here,” he says. “They’re buying their gas here. They pay their rent and mortgage here, but we want them to work in our community.”



The Community Vibrancy Initiative has helped the college put meaning and structure around these efforts — which President Hodges calls the institution’s “North Star.”

“This is the work,” he says. “Twenty years ago, the work was about access. Ten years ago, the work was about success. We have not moved from either of these, but now we are truly focused on community vibrancy. If there’s going to be transformation, it’s going to rest on our shoulders to make it occur.”

LESSONS LEARNED

Key lessons identified by P&HCC leaders include:

- **Recognize the benefits for smaller institutions.** While smaller institutions may have limited bandwidth, the Community Vibrancy Framework is crucial for two reasons, according to Dr. Hodges: It positions the college as “the economic engines of their respective communities,” and it “provides a matrix of metrics and a nomenclature that allows leaders to clearly and succinctly articulate the institutional ‘why.’”

“Capacity is a challenge at a small rural institution, but the ability to impact and affect change is significantly greater,” Dr. Hodges says. “We’re the only public higher education provider in our community, and if economic transformation is going to happen, we are the agency that’s going to make that happen. We’ve got to tote the water.”

- **Focus on intentional outreach.** While P&HCC had already built relationships with wide-ranging community partners to reach underserved populations, the community vibrancy work has reinforced the importance of more intentional work. “Previously, we were canvassing with a wide net and hoping [students] got caught up with it,” Dr. Hodges says. “But now we’re being much more deliberate and throwing the net specifically in their direction.”
- **Refine messages to underserved populations.** While half of P&HCC’s students are focused on transfer to four-year universities, the college’s leadership recognizes that the underserved populations it’s targeting “don’t have four years,” Dr. Hodges says. “We’re pushing very hard on the message that you don’t need four years. You don’t even need one year. We can get you wage growth in six months or less.” At the same time, leaders are ensuring the institution doesn’t lose sight of helping this population attain even more lasting economic mobility. “We can bring students back in through credit for prior learning to articulate that into credit-bearing courses,” Dr. Hodges says.
- **Develop a multi-pronged approach to reaching underserved populations.** The college’s work with addiction recovery organizations and partnerships, such as the targeted email listserv for entrepreneurs, reflect the college’s micro-targeting approach to reaching disengaged adults. “We’ve got several examples of really laser targeting to get into that community as much as possible,” Dr. Hodges says.
- **Address data collection challenges.** While one in five adults in the college’s service area works in North Carolina, the college can’t currently tap into the neighboring state’s labor market data — which impacts its performance metrics within Virginia’s community college system along with its ability to target and understand this population. A state-level agreement is expected to soon allow data-sharing across state lines, according to Dr. Hodges.
- **Reinforce the value proposition.** At a time when higher education is becoming politicized and growing numbers of people no longer believe in its value, community vibrancy sends a powerful message, Dr. Hodges says. “Simply put, no one can argue with good paying jobs, family-sustaining wages, and vibrant communities,” he says.

ATD’s Community Vibrancy Framework brings ATD’s strategic vision to life by supporting colleges in moving their student success work beyond completion and connecting their institutional transformation efforts with community impact. The framework helps colleges expand access to previously underserved communities, strengthen early momentum and completion of degrees and credentials, establish greater economic and social mobility for their students, and connect these gains with stronger and more vibrant communities. It also encourages colleges to become boundary-spanning institutions and is the backbone of ATD’s approach to innovation, coaching, and service delivery. To test the framework and associated curriculum, ATD engaged 15 ATD Network colleges to be part of its first Community Vibrancy Cohort. This profile is one in a series that explores how colleges are using the framework and lessons learned to date.



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