



## **#CCMonth: The Community College Advantage**

*-Terry R. Wells, Chairman, South Suburban College Board of Trustees*

More than 100 years ago, community colleges were created as publicly funded institutions of higher education at community-based facilities. They began a policy of welcoming all who wished to learn, regardless of age, race, gender, wealth or previous academic experience. The foundation of diversity, equity and inclusion. Community colleges have championed these ideals since inception.

Today there are more than 1,100 community colleges in the United States sharing common goals of accessibility with a commitment to high quality lifelong learning. Community colleges allow students to positively impact their lives, their families and their communities.

Everyone knows someone who is the product of the community college system. For some, it may have been a stepping stone toward an advanced degree, for others it may have been the last beacon of hope that inspired a newfound career path. A child, relative, friend, neighbor, or colleague who became a nurse, attained a specialized skill to return to work, earned a GED, was a first-generation graduate, transferred on scholarship to the University of Illinois, or even became a basketball national champion. No matter the goal, the success stories are all around us.

In spite of – at times – misconceptions, naysayers or even critics, the positive evidence is overwhelming when brought to light. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated the significant impact community colleges have on student outcomes, on training a skilled workforce, and on the local economy. In fact, a 2021 [economic impact study](#) by Northern Illinois University's Center for Governmental Studies revealed the Illinois Community College system accounts for \$3.5 billion in economic output and more than 43,000 jobs throughout the State.

Now in 2022, community colleges have emerged from an ongoing pandemic stronger than ever. New educational platforms, class delivery methods and student service models provide various opportunities for students to choose their own destiny. All while remaining a fraction of the tuition cost at the nearest university. And let us not forget the free community health role many of our institutions have played, most recently.

So, as we take a moment to recognize national Community College Month, let's make sure we celebrate our shared reinvestment in an old core value: accessibility. After all, it's what we've done better than anyone since 1901.

*Share your community college stories on social media by tagging posts with **#CCMonth**.*