

STATE BOARD OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES
Statewide Change Leadership Academy for Student Success
FY 2026-27

Request: The State Board of Community Colleges is requested to approve an investment of \$55,000 from the State Board Reserve Funds to the North Carolina Student Success Center to launch a statewide Change Leadership Academy for Student Success (the “Academy”) for middle-level leaders (under the VP level). The Academy will host at least one nominee from all 58 colleges (the “System”). The **Academy** aims to implement consistent guidance and proven methods that enable colleges to evaluate and improve college processes and engagement strategies for improved student outcomes.

The Academy is peer-state supported (MI, NY, OH, TX), facilitated by the National Center for Inquiry and Improvement (NCII), and follows an evidence-backed curriculum woven from national student success research. NCII has led Guided Pathways and Community College redesign efforts nationally for over 15 years. Further, NCII has led the national rural guided pathways project and has worked with North Carolina since the Completion by Design projects.

The year-long curriculum is organized into six sessions; each session has at least two modules that will be customized to state and institutional policy expectations. These sessions provide actionable guidance, case studies, and frameworks that translate national research into practical steps for improving program quality, advising systems, and middle-level leadership skills to manage the change process necessary for innovation.

Common evidence-based practices will build System Office and college capacity to adapt to future opportunities and directly improve community college student success outcomes. This is a two-year statewide Student Success innovation initiative that will prepare up to 30 middle-level leaders annually to bring change leadership structure back to their institutions and complete a year-long, college innovation project aligned with System Office priorities. Presidents will nominate program participants to ensure each college recommends the most viable project and leader to implement local innovation. Each college will determine a project where they will show communication and progress on something critical to future work readiness. Examples of the types of projects we anticipate are like implementing a new CRM process and focusing on adult learner re-engagement.

Strategic Plan Alignment: Goal 1: Recruit and retain top talent to enable the North Carolina Community College System to educate and prepare the State’s workforce; Goal 2: Increase

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access and enrollment at North Carolina community colleges to meet the state's educational attainment goal and expand postsecondary opportunities.

Background: North Carolina community colleges are serving learners whose journeys are increasingly non-linear. Rather than moving through education, from enrollment to completion, many learners enter, stop out, return, upskill, and reengage over time. Upskilling demand will become more widespread than ever before, caused by technology adoption opportunities and job role displacement across all sectors, including our own education sector.

This calls for educational leaders to accelerate and support skills based, market-aligned programs that are easily accessible by all community members, clear and stackable credential pathways that lead directly to employment, work-based learning opportunities to ensure professional readiness, and holistic support services that accelerate credential completion.

In addition to modernizing educational pathways and programs, colleges are modernizing internal systems to deliver effective reforms and programs solutions faster and more effectively. Research has consistently identified leadership as a critical ingredient for the successful adoption of evidence-based practices. Strong, distributed leadership at colleges supports crucial vision and rationale for sustained process and service delivery improvement.

Leadership Academy for Student Success Curriculum is supported nationally by Ascendium, ECMC, and Kresge Foundations.

SESSION	MODULES
Session 1: The Essential Roles of Leadership in Student Success	• Defining Student Success: Community College 3.0 • Fostering a Culture of Evidence • Higher Education in State Context
Session 2: Keeping Students' End Goals in Mind	• Improving Labor Market Outcomes • Improving Transfer at Scale
Session 3: The Student Experience	• Improving Teaching and Learning • Structuring Advising to Better Support Students
Session 4: Transformational Leadership for Student Success	• Leadership Qualities for Student Success • Striving to Center Student Needs as a Core Component of Leadership
Session 5: Institutional Capacities to	• Leading Strong Teams for Transformational Change

Advance Reform	• Leading Finance Strategically to Advance Reforms
Session 6: Effective External Partnerships & the Leadership Journey	• Leading Strategic External Partnerships • Excellence in Dual Enrollment • Reflecting on Your Personal Leadership Journey

Rationale: At a time when technological disruption, labor market change, and rising expectations for student outcomes are reshaping higher education, North Carolina must invest in leaders who can help colleges respond with clarity, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Through this Academy, we aim to build a coordinated effort across colleges to better interpret data, identify challenges, align reforms with strategic priorities, and accelerate solutions that matter to students and communities.

The Academy will provide a shared statewide process for applying evidence-based, strategy methods to student experience redesign projects. This project will establish a business case for building common leadership practices across the System; the Academy will strengthen cohesion, reduce fragmentation, and support more consistent redesign efforts.

Budget: Total investment of \$55,000 with projected costs as follows:

- \$36,000 for facility contracts, catering, travel, and tuition (6 in-person sessions)
- \$5,000 for project management and evaluation
- \$14,000 for Master Facilitator stipends (6-8 Subject Matter Experts)

The Academy, as created, serves as a foundational program investment that distributes high impact practices and strategies across the System. Scaling strategic priorities and practice is a critical function for System innovation and leadership, therefore this academy lays foundational principles of practice and leadership behavior necessary for responsive and adaptive college redesign.

Evaluation & Impact: The Academy will build statewide capacity to lead and sustain coordinated change across the System, equipping leaders to align strategy, people, process, technology, and partnership design in service of student success, workforce responsiveness, and continuous improvement. As the education industry evolves in both service delivery methods and learning design, North Carolina can demonstrate our investment in cohesive, statewide scaled innovation. Leading through technology and labor disruption together accelerates the System's capability to award high-quality workforce credentials and lift community economic prosperity.

Project Goals:

- 58 colleges participating and contributing documented innovation projects tied to strategic System priorities
 - Theme college needs to improve peer college support and accelerate project planning
 - Create a collection of success metrics, data sources, and best practices resources
- Identify 6-12 Academy host colleges that operationalize high impact practices

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