

## U.S. Department of Education

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### PRESS RELEASE

# U.S. Department of Education Announces First-Ever Postsecondary Success Recognition Program Winners

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The U.S. Department of Education (Department) today announced the winners of the first-ever Postsecondary Success Recognition Program (PSRP). Launched in [April 2024](#) by U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, the [program](#) celebrates institutions of higher education that are enrolling underserved student populations, facilitating successful student transfers and completions, and equipping graduates for careers that lead to economic mobility.

“Imagine a world where schools with the most Pell Grant recipients are ranked highest, where ‘prestige’ is defined by preparing graduates well to enter the workforce and lead fulfilling lives and careers—sometimes right in their own communities. Imagine universities that are raising the bar for access and equity becoming household names. This award envisions a world where that is possible,” said Secretary Cardona. “Instead of giving schools high marks for the number of students they turn down, we want to recognize schools doing the most to lift students up.”

The six colleges and universities honored as winners represent a cross-section of institutions serving diverse student populations, communities, and missions. Located in rural, suburban, and urban areas across the country, these schools demonstrate excellence in advancing student success while supporting equitable outcomes for all of their students.

The 2025 Postsecondary Success Recognition Program winners among predominantly associate degree or certificate granting institutions are:

- **CUNY Hostos Community College** (New York) (Transfer Focus)
- **Miami Dade College** (Florida) (Career Focus)
- **Salish Kootenai College** (Montana) (Career/Transfer Focus)

The 2025 Postsecondary Success Recognition Program winners among predominantly bachelor's degree granting institutions are:

- **San Jose State University** (California) (Master's Institution)
- **University of South Carolina – Upstate** (South Carolina) (Bachelor's Institution)
- **University of Texas at Arlington** (Texas) (Doctoral Institution)

These winners were selected after a rigorous process beginning with using publicly available data to measure institution performance on key indicators related to equitable access, success, and post-college outcomes at public and non-profit institutions across the country. The Department then invited 200 institutions – 100 predominantly associate degree or certificate granting institutions and 100 predominantly bachelor's degree granting institutions – that performed well on those indicators to apply. Over 120 institutions applied for the recognition and provided information on how they use data and evidence-based practices as part of an intentional, campus-wide strategy to ensure all their students, including underrepresented students, are earning credentials of value. The Department recruited a panel of nearly 50 peer reviewers, including leading experts, researchers, and practitioners from the field, to score applications. The top 20 institutions from the

application round then participated in a scored interview round conducted by RTI International, and the top 6 institutions from the interview round were named as the winners of the inaugural year of the recognition program.

The Department is also awarding a special trailblazer award to **Georgia State University**, in recognition of its role in inspiring the field not only through its well-known efforts to increase graduation rates but also for its work to support over 100 colleges and universities nationwide to improve their outcomes through the National Institute for Student Success (NISS). Thirteen institutions from this year's eligibility list are part of the NISS network including Albany State University, Georgia Southern University, John Jay College (City University of New York - CUNY), LaGuardia Community College (CUNY), Lehman College (CUNY), Manhattan Community College (CUNY), North Carolina A&T State University, North Carolina Central University, Old Dominion University, Sam Houston State University, University of Arizona, University of Illinois Chicago, and one of the winners: University of South Carolina Upstate.

"Since the very beginning of the Biden-Harris Administration, Secretary Cardona challenged the idea that our best colleges and universities are the most selective in granting opportunity – not those who do the most to share that opportunity," said Under Secretary of Education James Kvaal. "By creating more opportunities for valuable college degrees for underserved student populations, the winners of this program set a new standard for excellence in higher education."

"We are proud to be recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a leader in higher education," said Miami Dade College President Madeline Pumariega. "This acknowledgment underscores our dedication to advancing student success through innovative educational pathways that drive economic mobility and strengthen our role as the workforce engine of our community."

"USC Upstate is deeply honored to be selected as a recipient of the inaugural Postsecondary Success Recognition Program," said Dr. Bennie L. Harris, chancellor of USC Upstate. "This achievement reflects the

commitment of our faculty and staff to supporting student success. Our university is a special place that fosters a love of learning while helping students achieve their goals, pursue pathways they may not have considered possible, and improve their lives and the lives of their families. This recognition demonstrates how higher education continues to equip and empower students to make meaningful contributions in our local community, state, and world.”

“As a community college in the South Bronx, the poorest congressional district in the United States, our mission is to provide social mobility through education and to create lifelong learners who will uplift their communities for generations to come,” said Hostos Community College President Daisy Cocco De Filippis, Ph.D. “We understand that for our students, the stakes are high, and the challenges can seem insurmountable. That is why we dedicate ourselves to relentlessly supporting our students and helping them get their degrees with a *manos a la obra* (all hands-on deck) ethos that informs everything we do. While our students’ success is the highest reward, on behalf of the entire faculty and staff of Hostos Community College, I want to express our most sincere gratitude for this recognition of our efforts. *Mil gracias y bendiciones.*”

“This recognition from the U.S. Department of Education highlights San José State University’s dedication to helping our students achieve success, including reducing time to degree and fostering a strong sense of belonging across our campus. As Silicon Valley’s public university, we take pride in the efforts of our faculty, staff, leadership, and community members, whose collective commitment to our students’ success drives these outcomes,” said San Jose State University President Cynthia Teniente-Matson. “We are honored to be among the inaugural winners of the Postsecondary Success Recognition Program and look forward to celebrating this achievement in Washington, D.C.”

“We’re deeply honored to receive this recognition,” said Georgia State President M. Brian Blake. “It’s so emblematic of our innovation and commitment to advance access to higher education, foster student success and ensure meaningful outcomes beyond graduation.”

Below are brief descriptions of key initiatives that the winners are implementing to enhance completion and foster upward mobility for their students.

### **Postsecondary Success Recognition Program Winners**

(Note: All data cited are three-year averages compiled by the Department using Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and College Scorecard data for determining eligibility for the recognition program. Underserved students of color include Black, Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races.)

#### ***Predominantly Associate Degree or Certificate Granting Institutions***

##### **CUNY Hostos Community College – Bronx, New York**

President: Daisy Cocco De Filippis

Hostos Community College, part of the City University of New York (CUNY) system, enrolls a diverse student body of over 5,000 students in the South Bronx with over 90% underrepresented students of color and over 65% of students receiving Pell Grants. At Hostos, 56% of students transfer or graduate within 8 years, and students earn on average 1.4 times more than high school graduates in the state after college. Hostos puts student needs at the top of its priorities and offers resources to help students overcome potential barriers to their success, including their One Stop center, food pantry, and childcare center. Student Government President Dainma Martinez says “Hostos has been more than just an institution for me; it has been a community that understands the challenges students like me face. The support provided by Hostos goes beyond academics; it empowers us to find our voice, pursue our goals, and serve as leaders in our communities.”

## **Miami Dade College – Miami, Florida**

President: Madeline Pumariega

Serving about 40,000 students, Miami Dade College (MDC) is a public, primarily associate degree granting institution enrolling a diverse student body with nearly 90% underserved students of color and over 50% of students receiving Pell Grants. At MDC, 55% of students transfer or graduate within 8 years, and students earn 40% more than high school graduates in the state on average after college. MDC uses a “pilot-to-growth approach” to implement and scale student success initiatives by using data to rigorously test programs before expanding their reach. MDC also tracks key performance indicators, including early momentum metrics such as course completion, credit intensity, and retention as well as transfer, completion, and industry certifications, making these data accessible to faculty and staff and holding them accountable for the results. MDC Board of Trustee member Roberto Alfonso hopes this recognition will not only validate Miami Dade’s long-standing commitment to student success but also “expand our capacity to develop innovative solutions that can be shared with other institutions to collectively advance postsecondary education across the nation.”

## **Salish Kootenai College – Pablo, Montana**

President: Michael Munson (interim)

Salish Kootenai College (SKC) is a public, primarily associate degree granting institution chartered by the Tribal Council of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Indian Reservation in Western Montana. SKC serves over 600 students with nearly 80% underserved students of color and over 65% of students receiving Pell Grants. At SKC, 68% of students transfer or graduate within 8 years, and students earn more than high school graduates in the state on average after college. SKC views their commitment to student success as critical to economic development, community sustainability, and tribal sovereignty for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and the more than 60 tribes represented among their student population. SKC practices a holistic network approach to student support providing academic, basic needs, and career services through a

coordinated CARE team. "At SKC, promotion of a culture of success is the work of the whole college – every employee, every day," the college noted in its application. As a business major and member of the Couer d'Alene Tribe of Idaho, student Marie Aripa credits her success to SKC's "emphasis and commitment to culture and creating a space for students like me to feel supported in the pursuit of higher learning."

### ***Predominantly Bachelor's Degree Granting Institutions***

#### **San Jose State University – San Jose, California**

President: Cynthia Teniente-Matson

San Jose State University (SJSU) is a public four-year institution enrolling nearly 30,000 undergraduates. SJSU serves a diverse student body with 40% underserved students of color and 36% of students receiving Pell Grants. At SJSU, 75% of students graduate within 8 years, and students earn 2.3 times more than high school graduates in the state on average after college. Building on the California State University System's Graduation Initiative 2025, SJSU has made student success an institution-wide priority by setting and making steady progress toward its goal to improve graduation rates and to close graduation gaps. San Jose has put a particular focus on ensuring the success of transfer students on their campus including by addressing gaps in transfer rules to make it more seamless for students to transition their credits and reduce their time to degree. As noted in their application, SJSU leaders do not "attribute low graduation rates to student shortcomings," rather they "believe that it is our responsibility to support every admitted student on their path to graduation." SJSU's commitment to being a "student-ready campus" is evident in their outcomes.

#### **University of South Carolina Upstate – Spartanburg, South Carolina**

President: Bennie Harris

The University of South Carolina Upstate (USC-Upstate) is a public four-year institution in Spartanburg, SC enrolling over 4,000 undergraduates, with 46% underrepresented students of color and 50% of students

receiving Pell Grants. At USC-Upstate, students earn 60% more than high school graduates in the state on average after college. Nearly a decade ago, senior leaders formalized their institutional commitment to student success by establishing University College, which unifies support services under one umbrella, including creating a dean position focused on student success. USC-Upstate has adopted a centralized advising model to standardize its culture of care and provides life coaches to help students with non-academic issues that may impede their success. The president of OneSpartanburg, the local chamber of commerce, also commends USC-Upstate for its Re:Degree Spartanburg program which “re-engages local adults who have stopped out of college and helps them to navigate a path to degree completion.”

### **University of Texas at Arlington – Arlington, Texas**

President: Jennifer Cowley

Serving about 30,000 undergraduates, the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) is a public, four-year institution enrolling a diverse student body in the Fort Worth/Dallas area with over 50% underrepresented students of color and nearly 40% of students receiving Pell Grants. At UTA, students earn twice as much as high school graduates in the state on average after college. UTA proactively supports its students to ease their transition from high school to college to career. UTA’s Career Development Center provides personalized career counseling, employer partnerships, and hands-on work-based learning experiences with demonstrated impacts on students’ post-college earnings, economic mobility, and home ownership. The President of the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce Steve Montgomery says that “UTA is an invaluable partner in our collective mission to enhance business opportunities, promote economic mobility, and improve the overall well-being of our communities.”

### ***Trailblazer Award***

### **Georgia State University – Atlanta, Georgia**

President: M. Brian Blake



Georgia State University (GSU) is a public, four-year institution enrolling nearly 30,000 undergraduates including over 60% underserved students of color and over 50% of students receiving Pell Grants. At GSU, students earn 70% more than high school graduates in the state on average after college. While GSU has long been recognized for its impressive improvement story, the Department is recognizing it with a special trailblazer award for the work it is doing to share the lessons learned through its National Institute for Student Success. Led by Tim Renick, NISS has already partnered with more than 100 institutions and several university systems collectively serving over a million students in the last three years. The results have been promising so far: increases in retention rates for the first cohort of schools working with the NISS were four times higher than the national average. The president of the Student Government Association, James Wilson, says “My story is the story of thousands of our students who have come to appreciate that such a large institution can take such personal steps to ensure our success. The individualized attention and timely interventions provided by our advisors underscore Georgia State's commitment to supporting student success.”

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