



Common Characteristics of 2018 Gold Strong Workforce Stars

In 2018, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) recognized 114 programs as **Strong Workforce Gold Stars for their positive impact on students' workforce outcomes**. Drawing on the most recent available data from the state wage file and student responses to the CTE Outcomes Survey, these award winners demonstrated significantly higher student outcomes than other career education programs in the state, based on three key employment and earning indicators:

- Students experienced an increase in income of 50% or more,
- At least 70% of students attained regional living wage, and
- At least 90% of students secured employment in their field of study

The lion's share of 2018 Gold Star programs are healthcare related, with 40% of all Gold Stars being registered nursing programs. Other health programs include dental, paramedic, physical therapy, psychiatric technician, radiologic technology, and respiratory therapy. Many healthcare program approaches and practices exemplify the guided pathways framework, including cohort-based programs, clearly articulated requirements aligned with industry standards, strong support structures, embedded work-based learning, and stackable pathways that include certificate, degree, and transfer options. Plus, the healthcare sector is growing rapidly, ensuring that students can secure living-wage jobs in all parts of the state.

Construction and public services programs are also well-represented among these Gold Star winners. Often these programs are jointly designed with area employers. Several are apprenticeship programs, thus guaranteeing employment, union-negotiated wages, on-the-job training, and codesign and delivery of coursework. Finally, several accounting programs received Gold Star recognition.

In addition to themes in the types of programs that generate strong levels of economic mobility, six program characteristics emerged that are hallmarks of effective, evidence-based practices. Considered together, these characteristics provide useful guideposts for developing and delivering career education programs in any sector.

1. Industry Driven

Time and again, Gold Star recipients **cite the vital role sector partners play in shaping and delivering their programming**. Programs use a range of strategies that expand their relationships with employers beyond the traditional advisory board approach, designed to build trust, understand occupational expectations and trends, and position themselves as a go-to source for future employees. As one program chair put it, "The partnership is more than an advisory committee that meets once a year. I actively go and meet with industry partners at least once a month. I try to build a strong partnership, so when they are looking to fill positions, then they'll come to me."



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In addition to receiving direction on program curricula, several Gold Stars benefit from concrete arrangements with employers, government programs, and trade unions in their regions. For example, San Joaquin Delta College leverages a partnership with area Caterpillar dealers to offer a dedicated service technician training program. The employers recruit students, hire them once they begin required on-the-job training, and play an integral role in monitoring student progress, providing tutoring, and advising on instructional content.

Third-party accreditation and occupational licensure also serve as a powerful driver for program design and implementation. Most Gold Stars **align both content and instruction with external standards to ensure students were fully prepared** for the requirements of their future workplace -- particularly those offerings that fall in the healthcare sector and those programs that utilize an apprenticeship model. For example, Pasadena City enables radiologic technology students to complete clinical rotations in numerous settings and prepare for multiple licenses. By having a greater breadth of skills that are of clear value to employers, students will be well-positioned when applying for jobs.

2. Career Directed

Gold Stars **make a direct connection between program participation and related career opportunities**, which can serve as a powerful motivator for students to both enroll and complete, as well as contribute to their success in the workplace. As one department chair says, "The students know what they want to do, including their future specializations, because of their externship or work experience. Programs are successful when students know what the jobs are [even] before the start of the program."

Gold Stars reinforce these paths to employment through the **integration of real-world experiences** such as hands-on simulations, project-based learning, field experiences, internships, and clinical placements. For example, San Diego Mesa College's Physical Therapist Assistant program integrates 21st century and technical skills, taking a graduated approach to developing students' clinical skills. In the first term, students work on basic clinical scenarios and master communication skills, such as how to use medical terminology with colleagues versus non-technical terms with patients. Over the next three terms, students engage in progressively more intensive scenarios, moving from practicing on peers, to practicing on their teachers, to internships where they work directly with patients.

Cerritos College has dental hygiene students perform all their clinical work in the field, rotating between various settings so that each student gains experience working with adults, children, and people with special needs. Cabrillo College helps its dental hygiene students gain real-world experience by hosting a community clinic that serves 3,000 people each year. Students learn the business elements of running a dentist office in addition to clinical care.



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3. Faculty Led

Strong teachers are the backbone of any successful program, yet career education faculty have the unique challenge of being both effective classroom instructors while at the same time staying abreast of developments in their sector. Gold Stars repeatedly acknowledge that career education faculty **contribute to students' employment outcomes by working in the industry while teaching, staying connected through sector-based associations, and/or participating in professional networks.** By having one foot in the classroom and one foot in the workplace, faculty keep a first-hand pulse on industry trends and occupational requirements, and adjust program content and instruction accordingly.

For example, many faculty at El Camino College's Radiologic Technology program serve as worksite liaisons in addition to teaching courses. By visiting students' clinical sites each week, they can evaluate whether students have mastered key concepts. American River College's Emergency Medical Services program leverages adjunct faculty who are currently employed so they can share recent cases and help students troubleshoot solutions using real-life examples. West Hills Lemoore College convenes monthly meetings of Registered Nursing (RN) program leaders from across the Central Valley to discuss their programs and students with employers — demonstrating a unified and coherent approach to students' preparation across the region.

4. Student Centered

Effective programs **respond to the priorities, experiences, and needs of the students** who enroll, whether it be recent high school graduates, working adults, veterans, English language learners, ex-offenders, and/or transfer-oriented students. Many Gold Stars integrate academic support and focused educational advising in order to effectively meet students where they are and help them attain their goals. This "intrusive" support ranges from career counseling, educational planning, progress monitoring, tutoring, and one-on-one faculty intervention when a student is falling behind. Programs also frequently point to their cohort model as critical to building peer support and camaraderie, further fostering students' likelihood to stick with the program through completion.

For example, Foothill College's Accounting program developed online versions of all key courses to meet the needs of students who must fit course-taking around job and family responsibilities. The college ensures that students thrive in a virtual environment by offering online tutorials, providing complementary noncredit coursework, and ensuring faculty receive professional development on effective online teaching.

Several RN programs are specifically leveraging CCCC Enrollment Growth and Retention grants to expand supports for students. City College of San Francisco has two dedicated counselors, offers a pre-enrollment workshop on medical math and college success, gives weekly hands-on skills labs for first semester students, and develops remediation plans when student scores are low. Santa Ana College pairs a dedicated counselor with a student services coordinator to help at-risk students, hosts a peer mentoring program and tutoring, and provides laptop and



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textbook loans. Long Beach City College offers workshops prior to each semester where students can build discrete skills they will need for the upcoming term and reconnect with their peers.

In some cases, colleges are **taking the notable step of including students in program design and decision-making**. For example, Palomar College's Inside Wireman Apprenticeship program includes two peer-nominated student representatives on its advisory committee. When these students recently raised concerns about the time allotted to prepare for the state Journeyman Electrician exam, faculty secured additional funding and began offering tutoring to help participants prepare for the test.

5. Data Informed

Effective programs continuously **use data and evidence to direct the development and delivery of their offerings**, often by soliciting information from students and employers. For example, Yuba College queries its RN students each semester about their clinical experience and surveys alumni about whether they earned their license and if they felt prepared for employment. This information has led to changes such as having students do their first clinical placements in long-term care facilities so they can practice fundamental skills before moving on to the more complex hospital environment. Riverside Community College surveys employers in addition to students for its RN program. This input has led to curriculum adaptations such as adding modules on intravenous therapy, the Nursing Practice Act, and delegation, as well as redesigning the program to decrease the time it takes for alumni to complete baccalaureate programs.

Fresno City College's RN program analyzes data regarding student outcomes, predictive analytics, and test scores to understand students' progress and ensure stronger alignment of content across courses. In another example, West Hills Coalinga College examines employment outcome data for psychiatric technician students to inform their communication with industry partners. If there is a decline in student employment rates, they increase communication with key partners to understand and correct the issues that are affecting job placement.

6. Intersegmentally Engaged

Gold Stars **recognize the value of intersegmental partnerships for placing students on a path to employment success**. Whether it be through dual enrollment, articulation agreements, and/or summer bridge programs, several Gold Stars jumpstart students' career preparation while still enrolled in high school. For example, Diablo Valley College helps students explore a future in construction trades by offering an articulated course in AutoCAD and summer camps for high school students.

MiraCosta College's RN program has built strong relationships with both high schools and four-year institutions. K12 students are exposed to the program through articulated pre-certified nursing assistant courses, demonstrations in the nursing lab, and presentations at career fairs. The college emphasizes entrance requirements for the program and



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provides support to help students meet expected math and English levels. MiraCosta maintains transfer pathways to state and online universities, including negotiating tuition and dual enrollment credits. Other RN programs, such as College of San Mateo, De Anza College, and West Hills Lemoore, have also established concurrent enrollment agreements with four-year universities so that students are well on their way to a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) when they graduate from community college — positioning them to meet employers’ increasing demand for employees with BSN preparation.

Learn more about these career education programs at www.dwmshowcase.com.



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