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## **Chicago-Area Community College Launches Initiative to Boost Student Success With Latinx, Adult Learners**

***With support from a \$3 million U.S. Department of Education grant, Waubonsee Community College plans to improve support for Latinx and adult learners through coaching and advising***

AURORA, Ill.— [Waubonsee Community College](#), which is one of the largest community colleges in Illinois and serves a diverse student population in Chicago's Collar County communities, today announced a five-year initiative to increase Latinx and adult learner enrollment and completion rates. Through a \$3 million grant awarded through Title V of the federal Higher Education Act, the new initiative will increase Waubonsee Community College's capacity to serve Latinx students and adult learners, two fast-growing demographics within higher education.

In support of this plan, the college has enlisted [InsideTrack](#), a national student success coaching nonprofit, to provide holistic coaching and advising. The [Council for Adult and Experiential Learning](#) (CAEL), a nonprofit that works with colleges and universities to align programs and services with the professional and academic needs of adult learners, will work with the college to help leverage credit for prior learning as a strategy to accelerate the path to a degree, especially for adult learners.

"As the demographics of our communities and higher education continue to shift, it's critical that student support adapts to meet the needs of fast-growing student populations, including working adults and Latinx students," said Dr. Christine Sobek, president of Waubonsee Community College. "This work is about better understanding the student journey—as adults, Latinx, and other historically excluded populations experience it—and transforming our approach to coaching, advising, and creating streamlined pathways to a degree or credential."

Working adults [are increasingly interested](#) in higher education but face significant barriers to enrollment, including finances and childcare. Facing similar challenges, Latinx students complete degrees at lower rates than their white, non-Hispanic peers. However, completing an associate's degree or certificate can have significant positive returns: A recent study of Illinois community colleges [found](#) that Latinx students who completed an associate's degree in applied sciences or a long-term certificate program saw their earnings increase by 119 percent in the next three years.

The five-year campaign will kick off with [student journey mapping](#) sessions designed to understand the barriers to college access and success for Latinx students and working adults. Over the next three years, experts from InsideTrack and CAEL will use a "train-the-trainer" methodology to help the college integrate evidence-based practices for student support and credit for prior learning innovations that are proven to strengthen outcomes with similar student demographics.

Experts from InsideTrack, which has coached more than 2.5 million students over its 20-year history, will help advisors and staff refine their evidence-based coaching and student support skills to meet the needs of Latinx students and adult learners. Supervisors will learn how to integrate coaching into their day-to-day work with students and build and maintain a coaching program. Experts from CAEL, which has worked with colleges on credit for prior learning for decades, will support the college in developing tools and processes to assess students' prior learning and award course credit in order to shorten their time to completion and save them money.

"As a proud former community college student, I appreciate the vital role that community colleges play in responding to demographic and economic changes," said Ruth Bauer White, president of InsideTrack. "Institutions like Waubonsee are making good on that promise by continuously evolving and fine-tuning student supports to align with their students' increasingly complex experiences and demographics."

The training will culminate in an InsideTrack-CAEL certification for advisors and admissions staff who are trained in best practices in supporting working adults and Latinx students. In addition, Waubonsee will tap into CAEL's deep expertise in assessing institutional effectiveness in serving adult learners and using credit for prior learning (also known as prior learning assessment/PLA) to maximize adult learner success.

A [2020 report](#) by CAEL and WICHE found that providing credit for prior learning through the effective use of prior learning assessment can improve completion by more than 24% for Latinx students, 25% for community college students, and 19% for low-income, Pell-eligible students. Meanwhile, InsideTrack has provided coaching services for colleges across the United States, including a [five-year partnership with Wallace State Community College](#) that increased the college's graduation rate by 58%.

"CAEL takes an asset-based approach to serve adult learners well, recognizing each learner's unique strengths and aspirations," said Earl Buford, president of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. "This collaboration will equip Waubonsee Community College's staff and advisors to recognize work and life experience that qualifies for college credit and thereby reduce cost and time required of Latinx students and all adult learners. As a result, they will be even more responsive to students' needs and understanding of their complex family, academic and career commitments."

**About Waubonsee Community College:** Founded in 1966, Waubonsee Community College is preparing learners for success in the 21st century by raising student achievement through academic quality and technological innovation. WCC focuses on personal, experiential learning to help students adapt to the changing needs of business, industry and society. The college emphasizes a culture of diversity and global understanding. And WCC is committed to the future of its students, its colleagues, its institution and its community.

**About InsideTrack:** InsideTrack is passionate about helping all learners achieve their education and career goals through the transformative power of coaching. Since 2001, we've served 2.6 million learners, partnering with more than 250 institutions and organizations to directly improve enrollment, persistence, completion and career readiness. Our coaching methodology is evidence-based and research-confirmed, with proven outcomes for every type of learner — from traditional to adult, part-time to full-time, online

to in-person — including first generation students and those who face systemic barriers to postsecondary success. We also work with partners to build internal coaching capacity through staff training and professional services — designed to sustain advances in-house for lasting, scalable impact. InsideTrack is a part of Strada Collaborative, a mission-driven nonprofit. To learn more, visit [www.insidetrack.org](http://www.insidetrack.org) and follow us on Twitter [@InsideTrack](https://twitter.com/InsideTrack) and LinkedIn [@InsideTrack](https://www.linkedin.com/company/insidetrack).

**About the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning:** Recognizing that adult learners are the backbone of the U.S. economy, CAEL helps forge a clear, viable connection between education and career success, providing solutions that promote sustainable and equitable economic growth. CAEL opens doors to opportunity in collaboration with workforce and economic developers; postsecondary educators; employers and industry groups; foundations and other mission-aligned organizations. By engaging with these stakeholders, we foster a culture of innovative, lifelong learning that helps individuals and their communities thrive. A membership organization established in 1974, CAEL is a part of Strada Collaborative, a mission-driven nonprofit. Learn more at [cael.org](http://cael.org) and [stradacollaborative.org](http://stradacollaborative.org).

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