



# DATA SIZZLE

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## Building a Better Cohort

### A More Inclusive Look at Student Success at Allan Hancock College

As community colleges face rising accountability demands and a need for improved student outcomes, defining and measuring success has never been more important. At Allan Hancock College (AHC), we've taken a closer look at our data using a more inclusive model developed by the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond (Richmond Fed). This approach gives us a clearer, more accurate picture of how our students are doing, especially those who are often left out of traditional metrics. By expanding the lens through which student progress is assessed, this analysis aims to more accurately represent the diverse educational pathways of AHC students and to better inform equitable, evidence-based decision-making.

### Richmond Fed's Survey of Community College Outcomes (SCCO)

The Richmond model expands on the traditional Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) framework in three key ways:

- Who is counted: Includes all first-time (at AHC) credit students, not just full-time, first-time anywhere, fall enrollees.
- How long we track: Follows students for four years instead of three.
- What counts as success: Adds persistence with 30+ units to degree, certificate, and transfer outcomes.

Table 1: IPEDS vs. Richmond Fed Cohorts

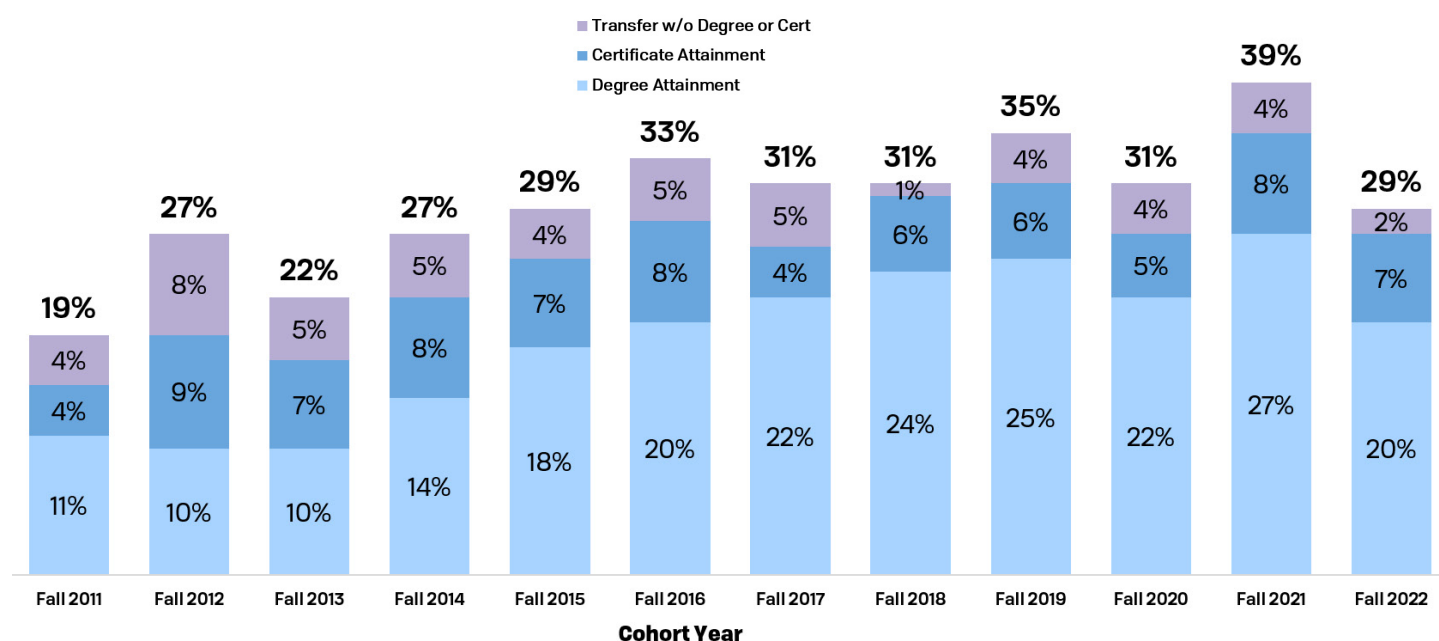
	IPEDS Graduation Cohort	Richmond Fed Cohort
Enrollment Intensity	Full-time credit students	All credit students
Enrollment History	First time non-special admit in college AND first time at AHC	First time at AHC
Semester of Entry	Fall semester	Fall or Spring semester
Enrollment Status	Degree or Transfer Seeking*	Degree, Cert, or Transfer Seeking*
Success Timeline	150% expected time to completion (3 years inclusive of cohort year)	4 years inclusive of cohort year

\*CCCCO research shows a missing ed goal is typically degree/transfer seeking. In this analysis N/A and undecided ed goal (SB14 M/X) students are included as degree seeking for the Richmond Fed cohort but are NOT INCLUDED as degree seeking for the IPEDS cohort due to stricter definitions\*

## Findings

The IPEDS model offers a traditional view of student success, focusing exclusively on full-time, first-time students who begin in the fall. Figure 1 illustrates how success rates within this narrowly defined group have changed over time. From Fall 2011 to Fall 2021, the total success rate rose from 19 percent to 29 percent, reflecting a gradual but steady improvement. Within this model, degree attainment has consistently been the largest contributor to overall success. It began at 11 percent in Fall 2011 and climbed to 29 percent by Fall 2021, suggesting that more students are completing their programs within the IPEDS tracking window.

Figure 1: IPEDS Cohort Outcomes for Full-Time, First-Time Degree/Transfer-Seeking Students by Cohort Year



In contrast to the IPEDS findings, Figure 2 presents student success rates using the Richmond Fed model, which takes a broader and more inclusive approach. This model includes all first-time students, regardless of when they enrolled or how many units they took, and tracks their progress over four years instead of three. It also introduces an additional category, persistence with at least 30 completed units, which allows us to recognize students who are making substantial academic progress even if they have not yet earned a credential. By expanding both the cohort definition and the types of success measured, the Richmond model captures a fuller picture of student achievement at Allan Hancock College.

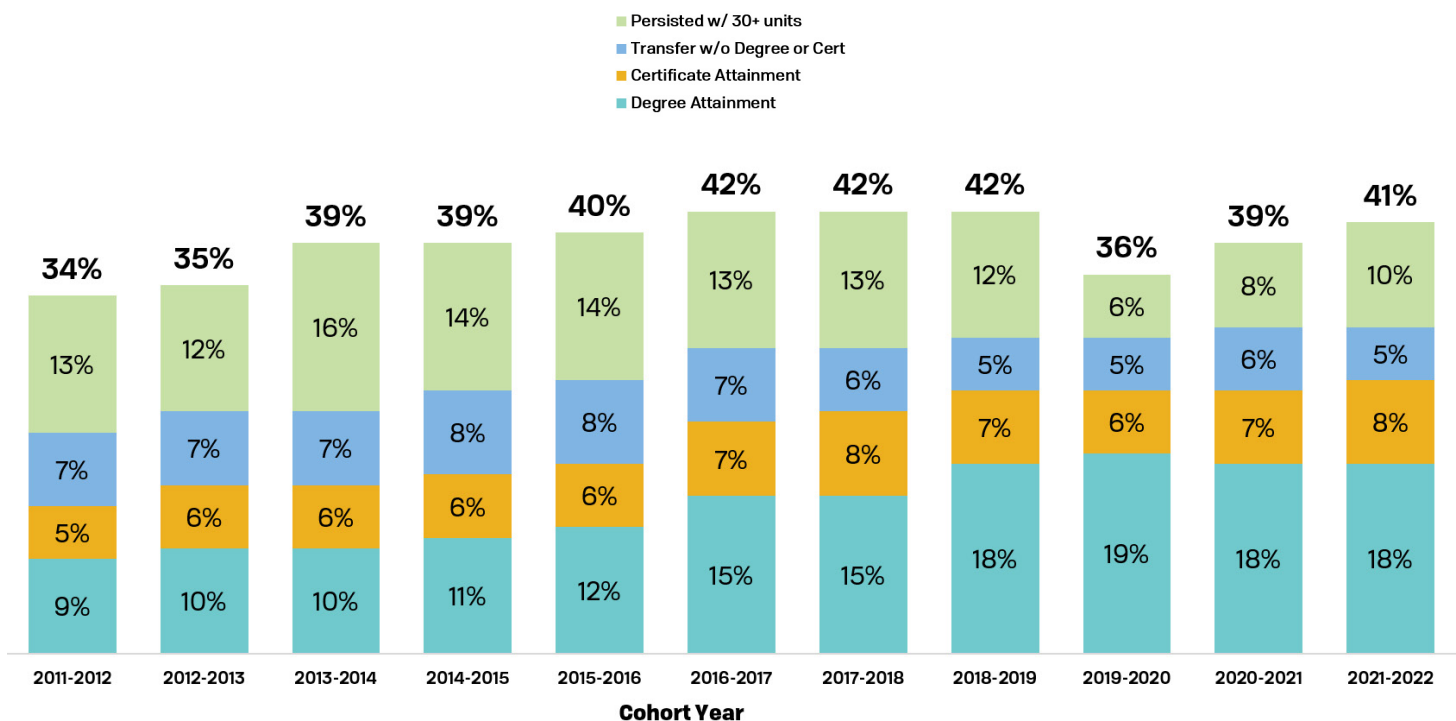
Over the past decade, the overall success rate under the Richmond model has gradually increased, peaking at 42 percent in several cohort years. This upward trend is similar to what we see in the IPEDS model, but the Richmond data provides a more nuanced view of how students succeed.

Degree attainment has shown consistent growth, rising from 9 percent in the early years to 18 percent in the 2021–2022 cohort. This mirrors the increase seen in IPEDS, where degree completion is also the largest contributor to overall success. However, Richmond includes students who may not have started full-time or in the fall, making this growth even more meaningful.

The most distinctive feature of the Richmond model is the inclusion of students who persist with 30 or more units. These students may not have earned a degree or certificate, but they have made substantial academic progress. This category is entirely absent from IPEDS, which means a significant portion of student achievement goes unrecognized in that model.

When comparing the two figures, it becomes clear that both models show improvement over time, particularly in degree attainment. However, the Richmond model provides a more complete and accurate picture of student success by including more students and recognizing a wider range of outcomes. It not only raises the overall success rate but also highlights the progress of students who are often overlooked in traditional reporting.

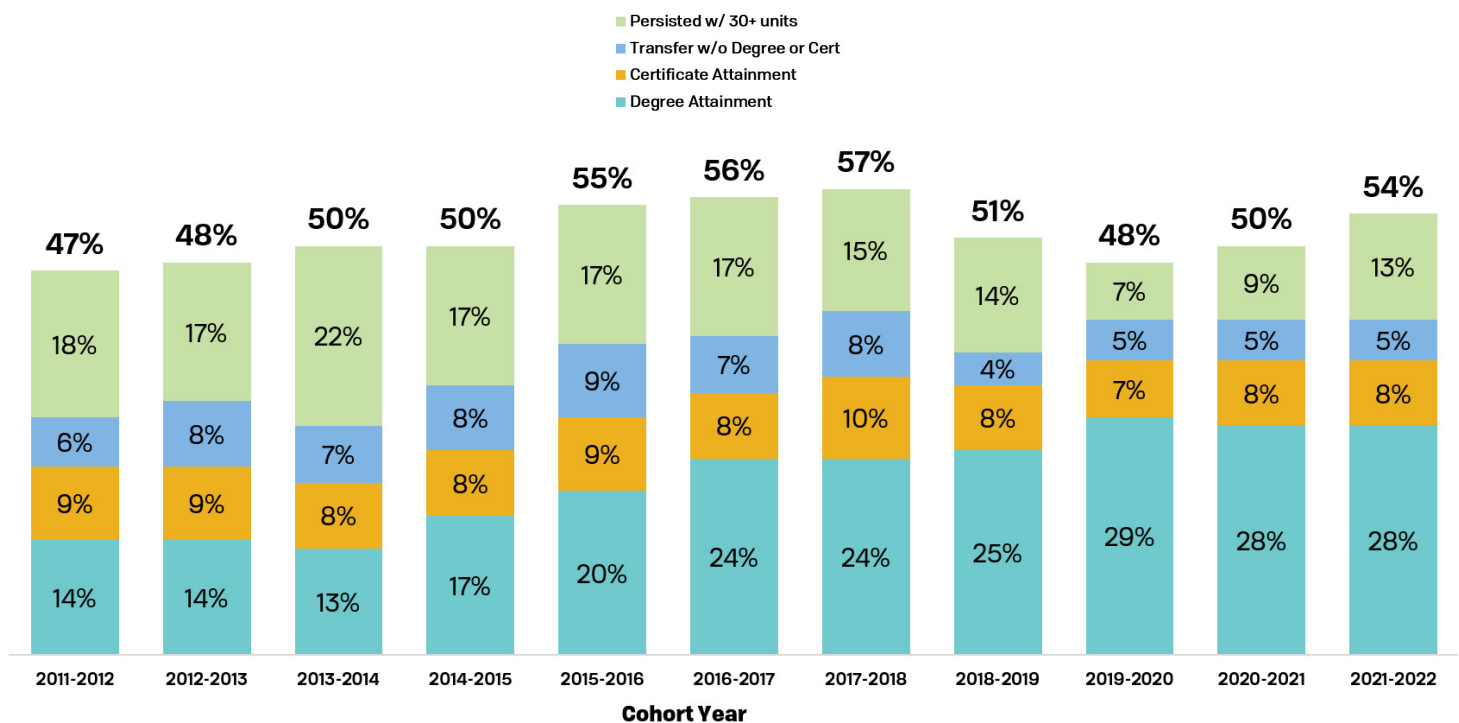
Figure 2: Student Success Over Time: Richmond Fed Cohort Outcomes



While both the IPEDS and Richmond Fed models offer valuable insights into student success, they differ significantly in scope and inclusivity. The IPEDS model focuses narrowly on full-time, first-time fall students, while the Richmond model includes a broader range of students and success outcomes. To better understand how full-time enrollment influences success within this broader framework, Figure 3 isolates students who attended full-time for at least one semester under the Richmond Fed model. This group more closely resembles the IPEDS cohort in terms of enrollment intensity, but benefits from the Richmond model's expanded tracking and success definitions.

Figure 3 shows the success rates of students who attended full-time for at least one semester, using the Richmond Fed model. Success rates for full-time students are consistently higher than the IPEDS model and the overall Richmond Fed model. In recent years, total success rates for this group have reached 54 percent. Degree attainment alone accounts for nearly 30 percent in the most recent cohorts, and persistence with 30 or more units adds another 13 percent. This figure highlights the strong link between full-time enrollment and student success. Even attending full-time for just one semester can significantly increase a student's chances of reaching a meaningful academic milestone.

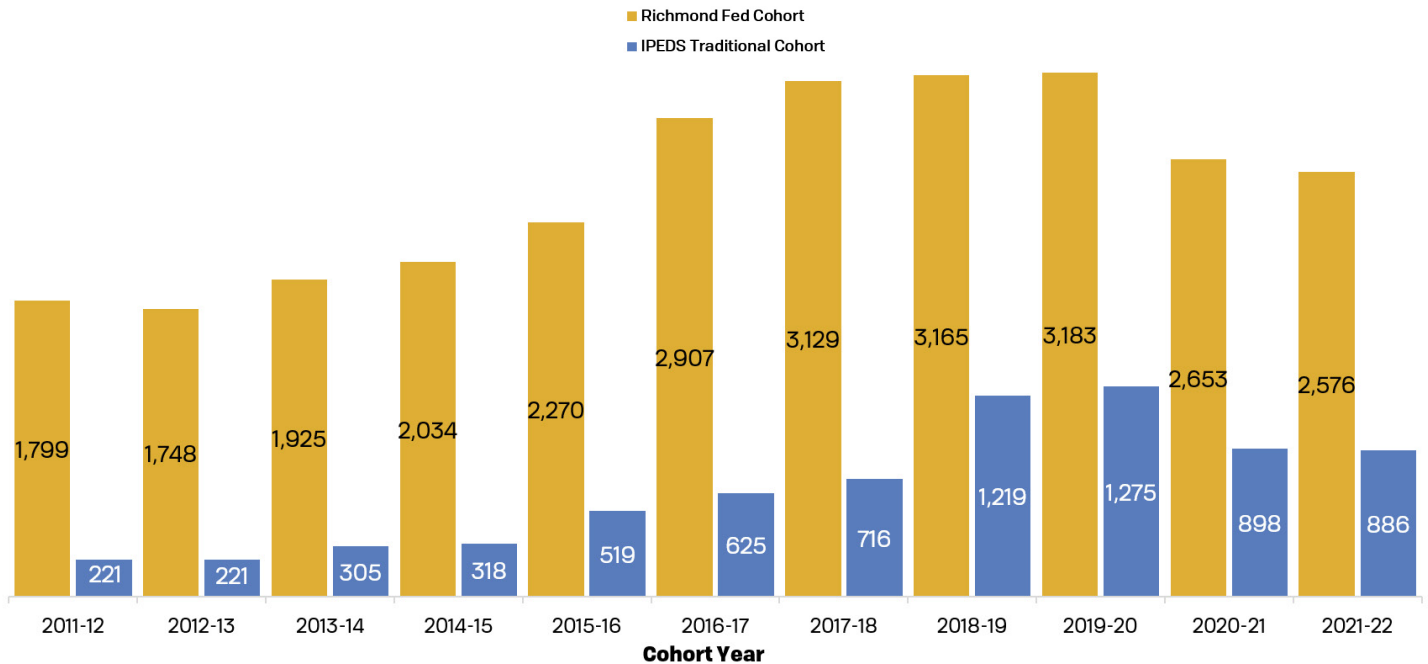
Figure 3: Richmond Fed Cohort Outcomes for Full-Time Students



To better understand the scale of impact between the two models, Figure 4 compares the number of students included in the Richmond Fed cohort and the IPEDS traditional cohort over the past eleven years. The yellow bars represent the Richmond cohort, while the blue bars represent the IPEDS cohort. The Richmond model consistently includes far more students than the IPEDS model. For example, in the most recent year, the Richmond cohort included 2,576 students, while the IPEDS cohort included only 886. This pattern holds across all years, with the Richmond model capturing two to three times as many students. The IPEDS model leaves out many students who attend part-time, started in the spring, or returned to college after time away. The Richmond model includes these students, giving us a more complete and accurate picture of who we serve and how they are doing. By using a broader definition, we ensure that more students are recognized for their progress and success.

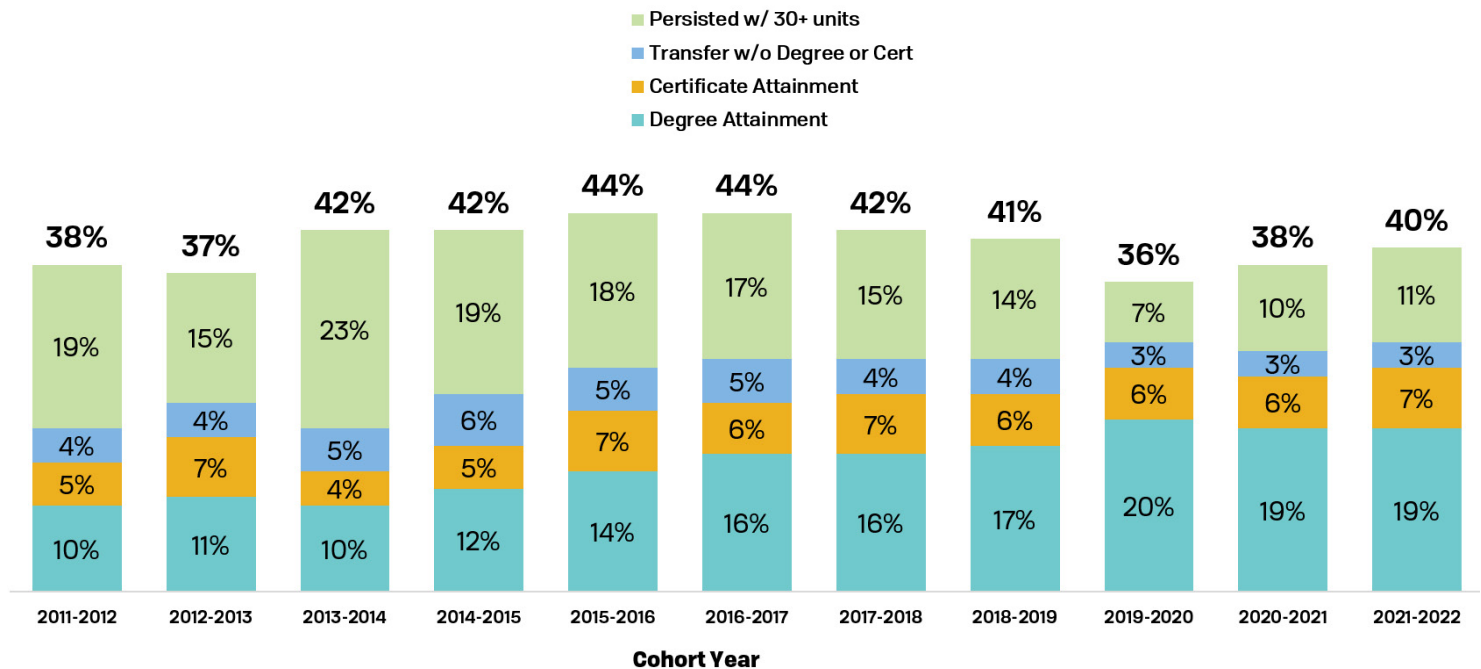


Figure 4: Cohort Counts – Comparing IPEDS and Richmond Fed Cohorts at Allan Hancock College



Building on overall trends, it is especially important to examine how specific student groups are performing within these models, particularly Hispanic/Latine students, whose success has steadily improved over time. In the most recent cohort, 40 percent of Hispanic/Latine students achieved one of the four success outcomes (Figure 5), with the largest gains coming from increases in degree attainment and persistence with 30 or more units. These improvements account for much of the growth and are especially significant given that Hispanic/Latine students make up a large portion of AHC's student body. The Richmond model reveals that these students are achieving at higher rates than previously recognized, unlike traditional models such as IPEDS, which often undercount part-time and non-fall enrollees. By using a more inclusive approach, AHC is better able to see and support the progress of its Hispanic/Latine student population. Notably, the overall Richmond Fed success rate for all students in the same year was 41 percent, meaning Hispanic/Latine students are performing nearly on par with the college-wide average. In contrast, under the IPEDS model, Hispanic/Latine students had a success rate of only 26 percent, compared to 31 percent for the overall IPEDS cohort—highlighting how the Richmond model not only captures more students but also more accurately reflects the progress of key student groups.

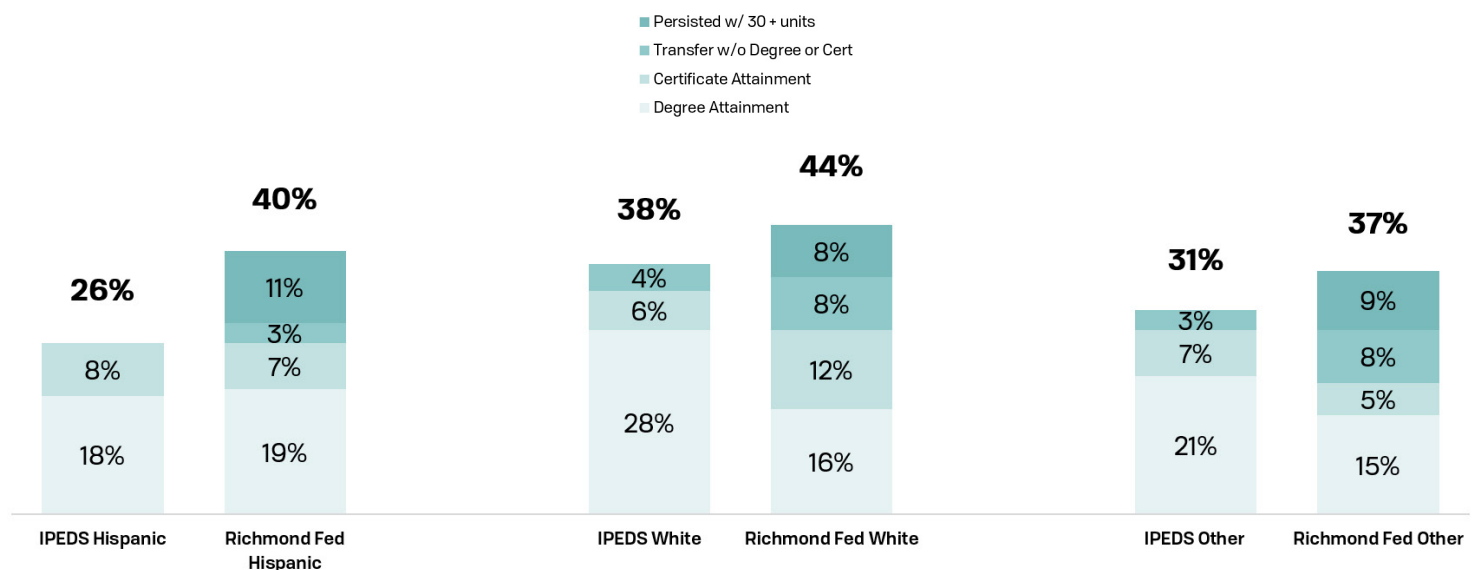
Figure 5: Richmond Fed Cohort Outcomes for Hispanic/Latine Students



*Smaller ethnic groups combined for display; full data available from Institutional Effectiveness*

Figure 6 builds on this insight by comparing student success rates by ethnicity for the 2021–2022 cohort, using both the IPEDS and Richmond Fed models. This side-by-side comparison further illustrates how the Richmond model not only captures a broader range of student experiences but also narrows apparent equity gaps. Under IPEDS, the success gap between Hispanic/Latine and White students is 12 percentage points, whereas under the Richmond model, that gap shrinks to just 4 percentage points. This suggests that many Hispanic/Latine students are making meaningful academic progress that traditional metrics fail to recognize, reinforcing the value of more inclusive models in accurately reflecting student achievement.

Figure 6: Richmond Fed vs. IPEDS Success Count: Ethnicity Differences for 2021-2022



*Smaller ethnic groups combined for display; full data available from Institutional Effectiveness.*

## Conclusion

The findings of this analysis underscore the importance of adopting expanded, equity-minded frameworks to evaluate student success. The Richmond Fed model provides a more accurate and inclusive understanding of student outcomes at Allan Hancock College, capturing the achievements of a broader range of students, particularly those underrepresented by traditional IPEDS metrics. By accounting for a broader range of students in these measures, we acknowledge and respect the diversity of our students, the work our colleagues do to support them, and the real value of our college.

While overall progress is evident, persistent gender and ethnic disparities in success rates and counts highlight the continued need for targeted support and policy interventions. By adopting more representative models, institutions can make better-informed decisions and ensure that success is measured in ways that reflect the realities of today's diverse community college populations.

Students who attend full-time, even briefly, consistently demonstrate higher success rates, and Hispanic/Latine students at AHC are performing nearly on par with the college-wide average under the Richmond model. These insights reveal that the differences between IPEDS and Richmond are not just statistical, they represent hundreds of students whose progress is made visible through more inclusive measures. By embracing models that reflect the realities of today's community college populations, institutions can make better-informed decisions and more effectively support student achievement.

## Team Spotlight: Erica Biely

A long, long time ago, I was a first-generation college student at Allan Hancock College. I sat in the same classrooms our students are in today, and I know firsthand how pivotal guidance, belonging, and timely support can be. With help, I earned my degree and transferred to UCSB, and I am proud to be an AHC alumni!



Those early experiences shaped my path. I started teaching part time at SBCC and AHC nearly twenty years ago, and for the last ten years, I have served as a Senior Research Analyst in Institutional Effectiveness. My focus is simple: turn data into insights that help us make thoughtful, student-centered decisions and improve student outcomes. I am excited about the momentum behind our comprehensive First Year Experience launching in 2026, which blends research, cross campus collaboration, and the student voice to strengthen the early college journey.

On a personal note, I am a wife and mom to four daughters,. Two are AHC graduates, and another will be attending AHC next fall. During my downtime, you will find me at our family ranch hiking with our dog, Buckley, riding e-bikes with my husband, catching concerts with my girls, or listening to podcasts that inspire and educate. Please share your favorites as I am always looking for new listens. I am a sucker for an inspiring story, a good quote, and Ted Lasso's brand of optimism.

"Doing the right thing is never the wrong thing." Ted Lasso

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