SOAR

RISING HIGHER IN EDUCATION
2026 EDITION



High School and College at the Same Time

The Early College Advantage

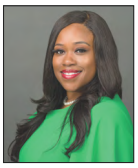
CERRITOS COLLEGE

SEAL OF EXCELENCIA
Excelencia IN EDUCATION
2024-2027
INTENTIONALLY SERVING LATINOS

SOAR

THE CERRITOS COLLEGE MAGAZINE

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Thank you to all Cerritos College faculty and staff for their contributions to this magazine.



TURNING ACCESS INTO SUCCESS

At Cerritos College, we go beyond simply providing access to education – we transform that access into success.

Our commitment to this mission is evident in our efforts to expand opportunities for higher education through dual enrollment, enhance pathways to earning a bachelor's degree, and strengthen workforce development initiatives that equip students for long-term career success.

Recognized as the #1 Hispanic-Serving Institution among California community colleges, one of California's pioneering Black-Serving Institutions, and boasting the #1 Return on Investment in Los Angeles County, Cerritos College continually redefines what access truly means. For us, access transcends merely opening doors; it involves fostering a culture of belonging, support, and achievement that empowers students to thrive well beyond their time in the classroom.

At Cerritos College, we actively eliminate barriers, provide unwavering support, and ensure that our students receive meaningful returns on their educational investments.

We invite you to enjoy this 2026 edition of *SOAR*, a tribute to the students, faculty, and staff who inspire our Falcon Family to soar higher each year.

Jose L. Fierro, D.V.M., Ph.D.
President/Superintendent

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Photo credit: @henao_photography



Opening Doors: A Decade of Dual Enrollment and Boosting Access to Education



A decade ago, a new state law made a simple promise: give more high school students a real shot at college. Today, that promise has grown into a program serving thousands of students each year — one that now includes a pathway to a free associate degree and, for its first graduating cohort, a 100% acceptance rate to four-year universities, including Ivy League schools.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of our dual enrollment initiative, which brings Cerritos College courses directly to high school campuses across the region. It all started in 2016, when AB 288, a new state law designed to help more students access higher education, took effect.

Cerritos College embraced this opportunity, shifting from a small partnership to creating supportive programs that help students prepare for college and careers. Today, in collaboration with four local school districts, we provide clear access pathways that help high school students get a jump start on their college education.

The newest addition to our dual enrollment program is Cerritos College's Early College Program. Starting in 9th grade, Early College allows students to earn college credits, gain valuable skills, and even earn an associate degree, all while they are still finishing their high school diploma. Offered at no cost, the program saves students thousands of dollars and provides a head start toward a bachelor's degree. This groundbreaking program was named a finalist for the 2026 Examples of *Excelencia* award.

MILESTONE TIMELINE

2016



Assembly Bill 288 took effect, creating a framework for dual enrollment.

2018 – 2019



Began offering dual enrollment courses at high schools in the ABC, Bellflower, Downey, and Norwalk-La Mirada school districts.

2021



Introduced a four-year structured pathway at three founding high schools to fulfill transfer requirements.

ACADEMIC AND CAREER PATHWAYS

Early College: A Head Start on a Bachelor's Degree

One of several dual enrollment pathways, Early College lets high school students earn up to 46 transferable UC/CSU general education units while completing their diploma. Tuition at Cerritos College is waived, and school districts cover textbooks — a debt-free jump start toward a four-year degree.

Five Career-Focused Pathways

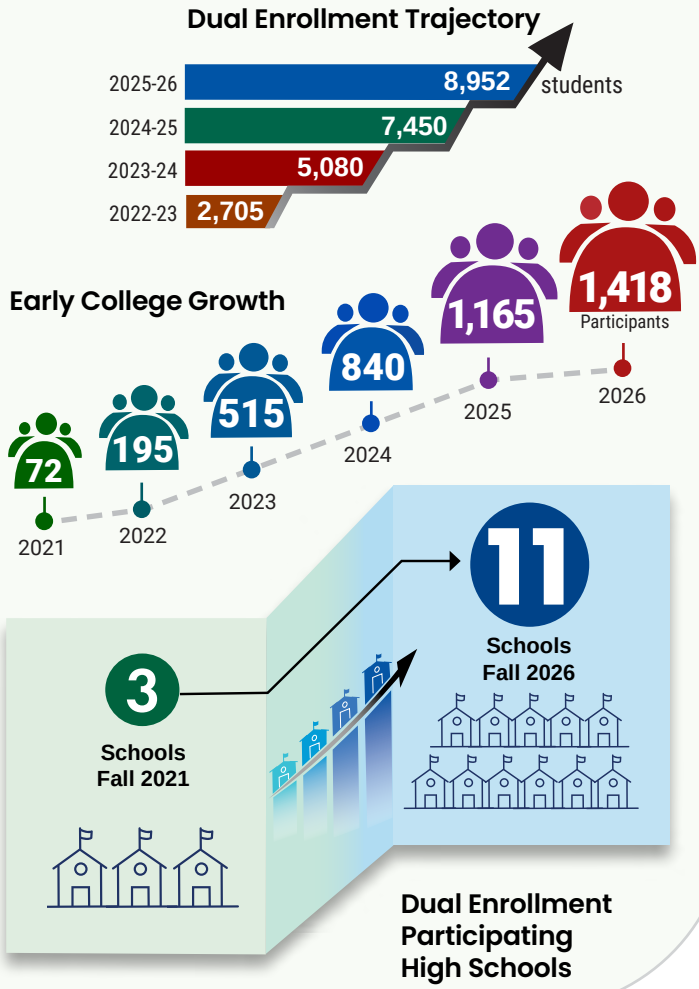
Automotive Technology
Mental Health Worker Certificate
Business Essentials Certificate
Kinesiology Pathway
Education (Teaching) Pathway

> *The program's accessibility and support made it impactful. With dual-enrollment classes offered at our high school, transitioning to college coursework felt comfortable and achievable. We received guidance throughout the enrollment process and in understanding college expectations, which boosted my confidence early on.*



— *Katherine Ante*
Class of 2026,
Sports Medicine/
Kinesiology

BY THE NUMBERS



SCAN ME
to learn how the Dual Enrollment Program gives students a head start, saving time and money.

2024



Expanded opportunities to justice-involved youth at Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall.

2025



Inaugural Early College class celebrated 72 graduates.

2026



Warren High School partnership won the California Department of Education Exemplary Program Award.
Early College celebrated 120 graduates.

Enhancing Education and Facility Development

College Invests in Early Education with Child Development Center Expansion

For local working parents and student-parents on the waitlist, the Child Development Center's expansion means one less barrier between them and a paycheck — or a degree. For over 50 years, the Center has been a vital community resource, providing high-quality early childhood care while training Cerritos College students to become the next generation of early childhood educators. The expansion will shorten that waitlist, giving more families access to reliable care.

This upgrade introduces dedicated spaces for infants and toddlers and enhances indoor and outdoor environments that foster creativity. It also gives aspiring teachers hands-on experience in a center recognized for excellence by Quality Start Los Angeles. By expanding access to reliable child care while preparing future educators, the project strengthens support for families and the local workforce.





Community Well-being Through

Health Science Building Reopening: A Boost for Southeast LA's Economy

For physical therapist assistant and dental hygiene students, the newly reopened Health Science Building means hands-on training on the same equipment they'll use on the job. Cerritos College reopened the renovated building in Summer 2025, expanding access to high-demand healthcare and vocational careers — from child development and cosmetology to physical therapist assistant and dental assisting. The building also houses our brand-new bachelor's degree in dental hygiene, launched in 2025. The renovation features modern equipment and technology that mirror what students will encounter in their future careers, giving them valuable hands-on experience before entering the workforce.

This facility serves as an engine for workforce preparation, equipping Southeast Los Angeles residents with the skills and knowledge needed to secure rewarding local jobs and achieve lasting economic mobility. Through this investment, Cerritos College is building a stronger local economy and ensuring a supply of highly qualified, locally trained healthcare professionals for generations to come.







A Bright Future:



In May, we cheered on the Class of 2026 as graduates walked across the stage, celebrating the over 9,500 degrees and certificates awarded this year. Their perseverance breaks barriers, uplifts their families, and strengthens our community's future. This milestone highlights the transformative impact of higher education and the meaningful return it provides to students, their families, and our community. Class of 2026, take pride in how far you've come, celebrate all you've achieved, and know your community is cheering you on every step of the way!





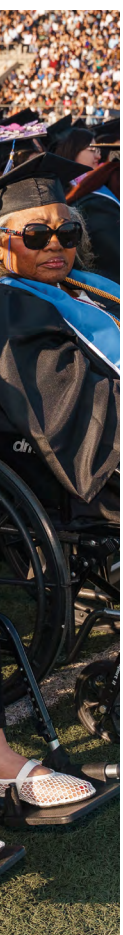




Celebrating the Class of 2026

Class of 2026 Spotlight







When Lynnette Bautista stepped up to the podium as this year's commencement speaker, she was proof that new beginnings are always possible. After choosing to rebuild her life for herself and her two daughters, she enrolled at Cerritos College to advance her education and empower others. Lynnette joined campus programs like EOPS/CARE and CalWORKs, maintained a 4.0 GPA, earned several prestigious scholarships, and became a semifinalist for the Jack Kent Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship.

Driven to help low-income families and survivors of domestic violence navigate financial systems, she is studying finance. Today, she works as a CARE assistant supporting student parents. Transferring to California State University, Long Beach, with honors, Lynnette aims to become a chief financial officer and establish a foundation to help others rebuild their lives.



Brendan Franklin

Degree: Astrophysics

Transfer School: University of California, Los Angeles

Goal: Become a professor to inspire the next generation of scientists.



Anahi Mireles

Degree: Mechanical Engineering

Transfer School: California State University, Long Beach

Goal: Improve adaptive devices and the lives of people with disabilities.

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to read more about our Falcons in Flight.

RESILIENCE and COMMUNITY EMPOWERM

From Classroom to Competition: 'Los Ingenieros' Shine in Red Bull Soapbox Race

A group of passionate Cerritos College students, known as Los Ingenieros, took their engineering dreams to thrilling heights at the 2026 Red Bull Soapbox Race. Thanks to the college's Puente program, Arelie Marquez, Ruben Orozco, Gabriel Ramirez, Hector Ramirez, and Andrew Solis formed a strong team, fundraising together and enduring late-night build sessions. They applied their classroom knowledge, using their engineering coursework to build a functional steering system and reliable brakes for their soapbox car, "El Velozo." Backed by Puente and the Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA) Program at Cerritos College, the students transformed their collective drive and technical skills into an unforgettable, real-world triumph.



Reflecting on my Red Bull Soapbox experience brings mixed feelings. I'm proud of what our team achieved, but it's strange not being together every weekend. We built more than just a soapbox car; we formed friendships and created lasting memories. I'm grateful to represent Cerritos College and bring El Velozo to life.

– Ruben Orozco, Class of 2026 Engineering



Photo credit: @marcschwarzphoto

Cerritos College Men's Soccer Shapes Future Leaders Beyond the Trophy

The 2025 Cerritos College men's soccer team capped an extraordinary season by winning both the 3C2A State Championship and the United Soccer Coaches National Championship. Beyond the trophies, the program serves as a launching pad for long-term student success. Under Head Coach Benny Artiaga, whose coaching staff was named National Staff of the Year, student-athletes develop the academic discipline and leadership needed to transfer to competitive four-year universities. Standout players like National Player of the Year Gustavo Arias exemplify how athletic rigor translates directly into educational achievement, degree completion, and lifelong career ambition that extends well past the final whistle.





Access to education is crucial for student-athletes, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It's vital to prepare them for life after sports. True championships are measured by earned degrees and the ability to become successful members of society. We contribute to shaping future leaders and mentors.

– Benny Artiaga, alumnus and Men's Soccer Head Coach

ENT Through EDUCATION and TEAMWORK

Accelerate Your Career: Inside the Award-Winning GM ASEP Program

Students in Cerritos College's General Motors Automotive Service Education Program (GM ASEP) train as automotive technicians, working as paid dealership employees from day one, with a direct pathway to full-time employment at GM dealerships. With a 78% on-time graduation rate and 95% of graduates entering high-demand dealership jobs, the program translates education into immediate economic opportunity. This success stems from a strategic partnership among Cerritos College, General Motors, and regional automotive leaders. Together, we align classroom instruction, equipment, and hands-on dealership training with real-world workforce needs. The program's remarkable track record earned it the 2025 Examples of *Excelencia* recognition.





GM ASEP has been fun and a great way to gain hands-on experience in a dealership. I'm grateful for the opportunity to work and attend school at the same time. Many former graduates recommended the program, and so far, it's been a valuable pathway to my career.

– Angel Sicilia, GM ASEP student

Navigating New Beginnings: LINC/NextUp's Holistic Approach for Foster Youth

Starting college as a foster youth can feel overwhelming, but LINC/NextUp ensures that no student has to figure it out on their own. The program builds a genuine community of belonging at Cerritos College, surrounding students with tailored academic guidance, tutoring, and priority registration so they stay on track toward their goals. By removing financial barriers—covering expenses like textbooks, transportation, and emergency needs—this approach reduces daily stress so students can focus on learning. Through strong campus and community networks, LINC/NextUp creates a steady safety net, giving foster youth the personal support, resources, and confidence needed to persist and succeed.



LINC/NextUp has been instrumental in navigating my education at Cerritos College. Through this program, I discovered a mentor, and the people here have truly become my family. Serving as an ambassador for LINC/NextUp empowered me to use my voice to share my lived experience and make a difference.

– Michael Jayden, LINC/NextUp alumnus



The Falcon Family:

Building Connections for a Brighter Tomorrow

At Cerritos College, our team does far more than keep the campus running — we unite minds, inspire futures, and transform our community. Every faculty and staff member contributes directly to creating opportunities that empower our students to succeed. Meet a few of the dedicated individuals who make Cerritos College a vibrant place to learn, grow, and make a lasting impact.

Faculty and Staff Recognized by CSULB for Community Impact

MESA Program Manager Helen Barriere and Adjunct Counselor Louis Williams were recognized as part of Cal State Long Beach's 49 Under 49, which celebrates exceptional alumni under 49 who are making transformative contributions in their communities and beyond.

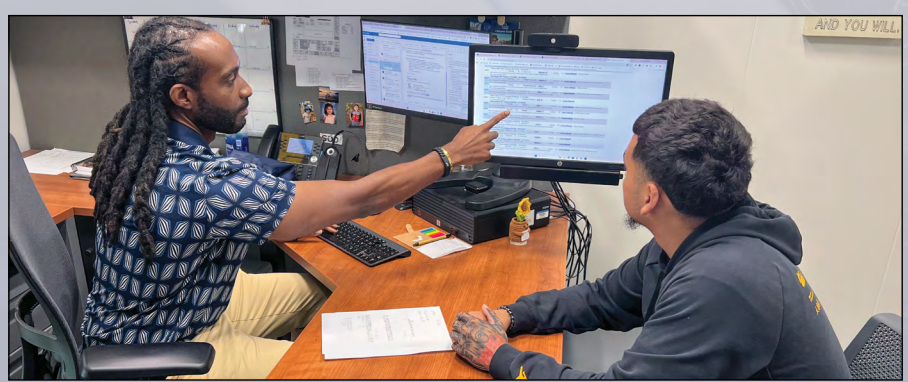


Helen Barriere: MESA Program Manager at Cerritos College since 2025. She specializes in developing STEM and research skills and has 15 years of experience supporting thousands of students. Through MESA (Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement), she supports underserved and underrepresented students pursuing calculus-based degrees.





Louis Williams: Adjunct counselor at Cerritos College since 2022. He is an equity advocate dedicated to empowering foster youth and marginalized students. He founded the Louis O. A. Williams Scholarship at CSULB and mentors young men in leadership through his fraternity and the Community College Association.



Thank you, Helen and Louis, for your commitment to helping our students thrive in education and beyond!

Dr. Chelena Fisher Empowers Students with Heart and Humor



Dr. Chelena Fisher, a Cerritos College counselor, leads with heart and humor, fostering an environment where every student feels acknowledged, encouraged, and able to thrive. Her office, decorated with drawings from former students and an eclectic collection of rubber ducks, reflects her belief that every individual's story matters.

Approaching her role like a living puzzle, Chelena focuses on building deep, meaningful relationships and a welcoming campus community. Whether guiding an athlete-turned-EMT or a writer entering their next stage in life after retirement, she meets students exactly where they are. Chelena pushes them to look beyond immediate coursework to envision their full potential and future possibilities.

Driven by the belief once placed in her by her own mentor, Chelena offers unwavering encouragement and genuine connection. Her approachable, adventurous spirit helps students build confidence, proving they aren't just navigating college — they belong.



Be Part of a Purpose-Driven Community

Building meaningful connections is fundamental to everything we do. Leaders like Dr. Chelena Fisher, Helen Barriere, and Louis Williams show how a career at Cerritos College goes far beyond a job. It's an opportunity to uplift lives, strengthen communities, and shape the future of entire generations.

Feeling inspired to make an impact in your community? Bring your talents to Cerritos College and join a supportive, passionate team dedicated to changing lives through education. Work where your contributions truly matter.



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for current employment opportunities.



Taking **Student Needs** to Sacramento

From left: Felipe Lopez, Executive Vice President of Business Services; Dr. Jose Fierro, President/Superintendent; Gustavo Sanchez, 2025–26 Student Trustee; Assemblymember José Luis Solache; Mariana Pacheco, Trustee; and Andrea Wittig, Director, Office of the President, Government Relations, Trustee Services, & Strategic Initiatives.



Getting to college should be exciting — not confusing. But for many students, the steps between high school and college can become barriers in their own right.

That is why Cerritos College is taking the needs of our students and families directly to Sacramento.

This year, the College has worked with state legislators, education partners, and students to advance policies that make higher education easier to access. One of those efforts is Assembly Bill 1636, authored by Assemblymember José Luis Solache.

The idea behind the bill grew from work already happening here at Cerritos College. Through the College Bound Buccaneers Program, College staff work directly with local high school students before they graduate, helping them complete important steps to attend Cerritos College. In its first year, the program increased enrollment among participating students by 124%.

AB 1636, signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom in September 2026, will build on that success by creating an easier pathway for participating high school students to become Cerritos College students. With appropriate student consent, information already available through local K–12 schools will help create a college student record and connect students with the next steps they need to enroll.

For students and families, the goal is simple: fewer forms, fewer barriers, and an easier path from high school to college.

This is what advocacy means at Cerritos College: bringing the experiences of our students and community to state leaders and working together to turn local solutions into opportunities for more students.

CERRITOS COLLEGE

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Cerritos College Delivers Results

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COLLEGE FUTURES

THE HEA GROUP

#1 in Los Angeles County, #10 in California for Return on Investment

Washington MONTHLY

Spring Semester Begins January 11!

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to apply and join the Falcon Family.

Cerritos College is committed to providing an educational environment that is free from discrimination and harassment. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or any other characteristic protected by law in any of our programs or activities. For more information regarding our policies, please contact our Director, Compliance, Diversity, & Title IX Coordinator/Section 504 & Title II Coordinator at www.cerritos.edu/hr.

Cerritos College is fully accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.