

Finding Their Next: Career & Transfer Outcomes (2025)



Where They Go. What They Earn. How They Rise.



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THE RESEARCH INSTITUTE
DALLAS COLLEGE

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Acknowledgements

This report was created through the collaboration of multiple Dallas College divisions, teams, and staff. As part of the Level Up 2030 initiative, Dallas College leadership created a committee on post-completion success in 2023 that developed and piloted a new First Destination Survey of graduating students. Over the past two years, several people have given feedback and lent their expertise in varying capacities to the implementation and iteration of this survey. I thank Chancellor Justin Lonon, Vice Chancellor Beatriz Joseph, Derek Soper, Paula Guidry-Zeba, Martha Fernandez, Catherine Olivarez, Erinn Farrell, David Mahan, Manju Shah, Sayeeda Jamilah, Tracie Lowe, Hongxia Fu, Tana Hicks, Jema Lomas, Rogers Oliveira, Amber Raley, Betsy Rivas, April Owens, Priscilla O'Neill, Brooke Ryan, Lexi Calhoun, Sharon Manna, Tracy Steenholdt, Janae Posley, McKenna Griffin, Dillon Lu, Olivia Pietrzak, Avery McNaughton, Camille Lee, Jamal Williams, Ashley Bergerson, and Clint McClain for their contributions to the committee, survey, and this report.

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Executive Summary

Finding Their Next: Career & Transfer Outcomes (2025) presents Dallas College's first annual analysis of where graduates go, what they earn, and how they rise after earning a credential. Using new data from the First Destination Survey, which asks students about their post-college plans within the first few months after completing a credential, this report offers a detailed picture of how Dallas College graduates transition to work and further education. This year's results, largely positive in terms of respondents' sentiment, establish a benchmark to build upon and demonstrate how the college can annually monitor students' post-college outcomes.

Key findings include:

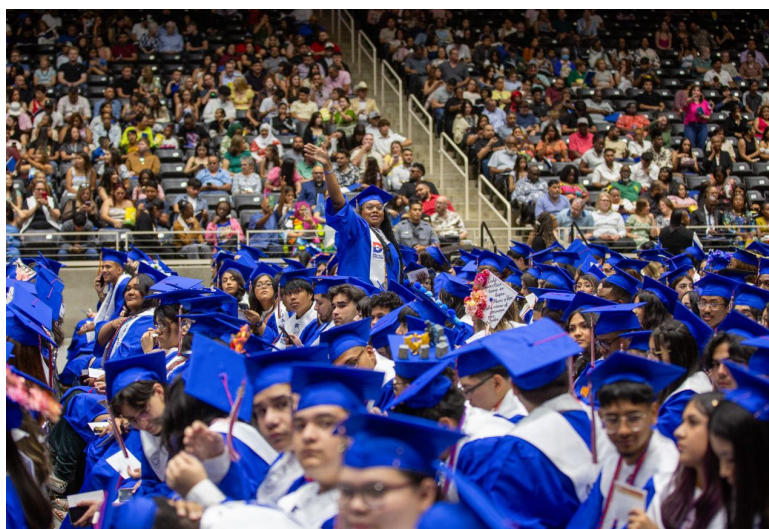
- **Post-College Plans:** Among survey respondents from Fall 2024 and Spring 2025, 84% knew their next step: 24% planned to work, 40% to pursue further education, and 19% to do both. Only 16% were undecided or still seeking, with these students having the option to be connected with the Career and Transfer Skills Development office.
- **Student Satisfaction and ROI:** Respondents overwhelmingly rated their Dallas College experience positively, with 86% or more agreeing that their education was worth the cost, prepared them for their next step, and helped them achieve their goals. Classes, faculty, and financial aid were cited as the most valuable aspects of their experience.
- **Transfer Pathways:** Most respondents who will pursue further education, 59%, will do so at public Texas universities. Nearly 1 in 4, however, will continue at Dallas College itself, reflecting the growing appeal of in-house stackable credentials and bachelor's degrees.
- **Career Outcomes:** Respondents who said they will pursue employment are earning an average of \$51,000 per year, or \$24.52 per hour. Enrollment in high-demand fields and alignment between students' programs and jobs were associated with higher earnings.
- **Program and Sector Patterns:** Health, STEM, business, and education led respondents' occupation and sector placement. Many caring professions valued by graduates, such as teaching or nursing, deliver long-term impact that outpaces short-term compensation.

The data underscore both the promise and the challenge of post-completion success. While Dallas College has made real progress in helping students chart their futures, today's students

are graduating into a challenging, changing labor market and economic climate. Looking ahead, we offer three key recommendations for Dallas College to continue to advance student success.

- 1. Improve and align college entry and exit data collection:** This year's First Destination Survey participation was limited (13%), leaving gaps in understanding student outcomes for both completers and non-completers. Making the survey mandatory, strengthening outreach, and linking it with entry surveys would provide a comprehensive view of the student journey. Integrating this information with the case management approach of the Learner Care Model would enable a more holistic understanding of student pathways.
- 2. Adopt and prioritize unified definitions of post-college success:** Dallas College currently lacks a shared definition of post-college success, particularly around wages and financial outcomes. Collaborating to establish a research-backed standard and embedding these outcomes into KPIs would align efforts to measure student success beyond completion. This approach would provide senior leadership with consistent metrics to guide strategy.
- 3. Continue to expand career services and adult learner offerings:** Students expressed strong demand for career support and adult-focused programming, with many directly requesting job search and transfer assistance. The college should continue to expand career services staffing, career exploration tools, employer partnerships, and evening / weekend course offerings to better serve both traditional students and working adults.

This year's initial survey findings grant Dallas College a stronger foundation to understand, support, and elevate the post-college journeys of its students. And this year's recommendations strive to deepen the college's impact, ensuring every graduate has a clear way to *find their next*.

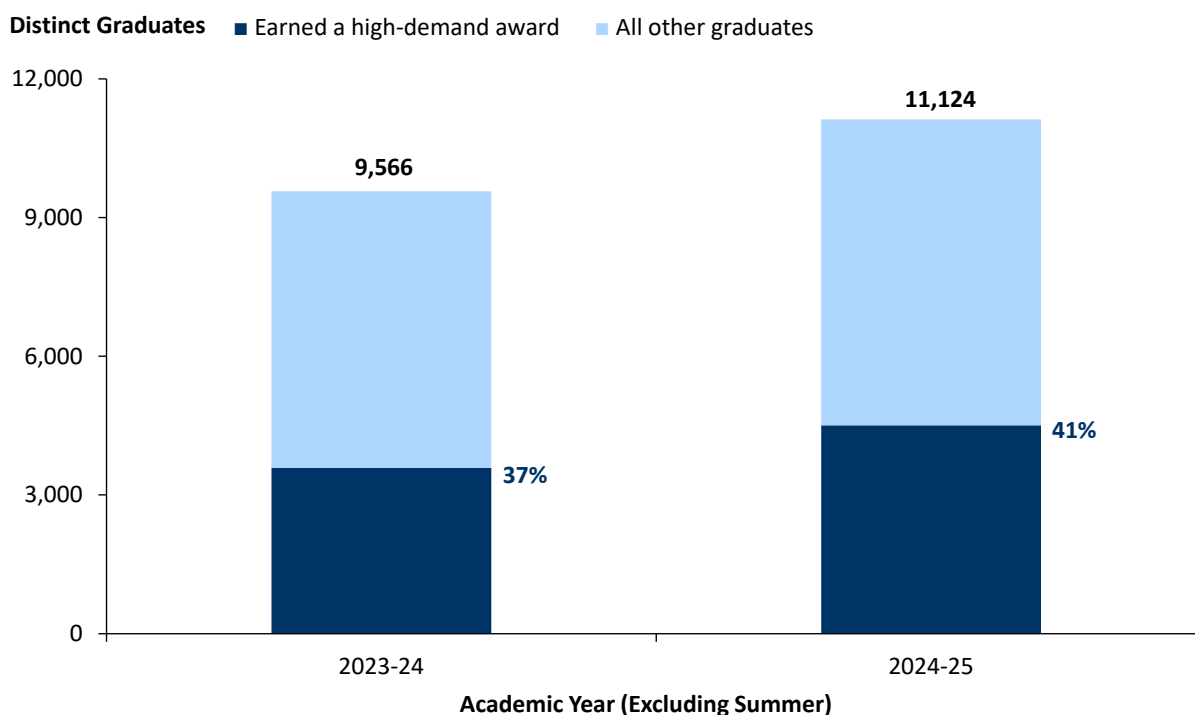


Introduction

During Fall and Spring of the 2024-2025 academic year, more than 11,000 graduates completed a credential at Dallas College, with more than 41% of them earning an award in a statewide or regional high-demand field (Figure 1). As these recent graduates move onto their next steps, whether growing in their careers or pursuing further education, it is critical that Dallas College and its surrounding community, region, and state understand where they go, what they earn, and how they rise. Answering these questions helps the college to continuously improve post-college success so that more of its students fulfill their educational and economic endeavors.

Figure 1

Total Number of Graduates, Share with High-Demand Awards Edge Up Year-Over-Year



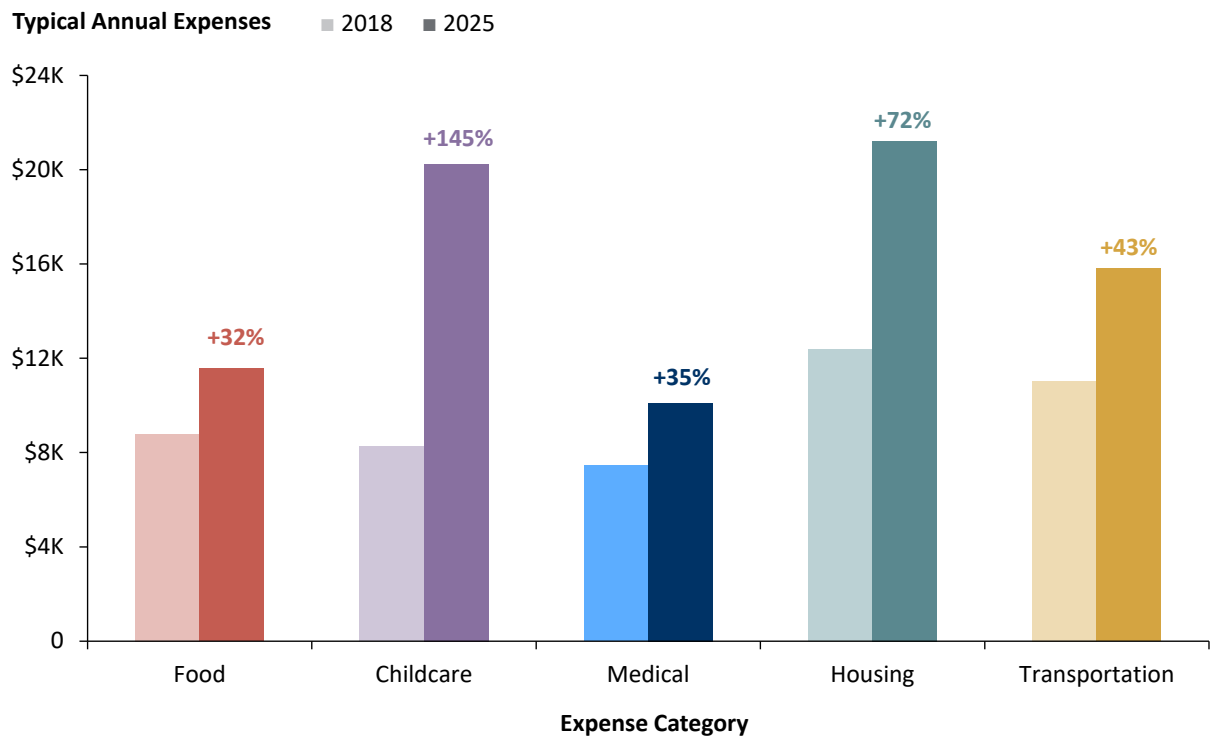
Sources: Dallas College; Research Institute calculations.

Note: High-demand fields are those designated for FY24 by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and Texas Workforce Commission as associated with essential or emerging occupations statewide or within a college's region.

Today's community college graduates, whether employed in the labor market or enrolled at a university, are entering into a period of change and disruption. New technologies are affecting how we work, how we study, and how we lead our lives, adding uncertainty to students' job searches and educational endeavors. In Dallas County, graduates also face a rising cost of living. Earning a living wage—or, in other words, pay that is high enough to cover essential household

expenses and basic needs—is more challenging today than ever before. In 2025, the inflation-adjusted living wage for Dallas County is \$64,095 per year (or around \$30.81 per hour, full-time) according to the Commit Partnership, up from \$50,000 in 2018. Estimates for 2025 from the Living Wage Calculator show that expenses on food, childcare, health care, and housing for a family of two working adults and two children have risen considerably since 2018 (Figure 2). These basic costs can often feel even more burdensome for single parents and those with additional caregiving commitments.

Figure 2
Expenses on Most Essential Goods & Services Have Risen Over Time in Dallas County



Sources: Living Wage Calculator; Research Institute calculations.
Note: Estimates shown are for a household with two working adults and two children.

While Dallas College cannot directly control these environmental factors, it does have a responsibility to assist its students in finding their next steps, advising and placing graduates into high-quality programs and careers aligned with their aspirations. We have created this new annual report to monitor how well we are achieving our mission of transforming lives and communities through higher education and fulfilling one of our overall purposes—ensuring Dallas County is vibrant, growing, and economically viable for current and future generations. In this first edition, we assess how recent graduates are faring in the labor market, what their top transfer destinations are, and how their Dallas College experience shapes where they are today.

Data and Methods

To understand post-graduation outcomes, this report uses data from a new First Destination Survey of students who completed a credential in Fall 2024 and Spring 2025. Launched this academic year, the survey asks graduating students what their next steps are after finishing a credential at Dallas College. Survey respondents indicate whether their plans include further education, employment, both, or that they are still seeking and deciding their next steps. The survey allows Dallas College to better track job and education placement, align programs with workforce demand, improve career services and advising, and share data with its community.

This year, out of 11,124 distinct graduates in Fall 2024 and Spring 2025, 1,479 graduates completed the five-minute survey, for a 13% response rate. The survey was sent to Fall graduates via email starting in December 2024, with monthly reminders sent through March. Spring graduates were sent the survey via email starting in April 2025 with monthly reminders through August. The survey closed on September 1, 2025, so responses were gathered during a 4-5 month window around graduation. Participation in the survey was voluntary and the sample of students who completed the survey was not random. Both Credit and Continuing Education graduates were able to participate, but the vast majority of respondents earned credit awards (> 98%). And while all students were encouraged to participate, we recommend that the survey be mandatory in future years, or at least further integrated into exit or graduation processes, in order to ensure that respondents are fully representative of the college's population.

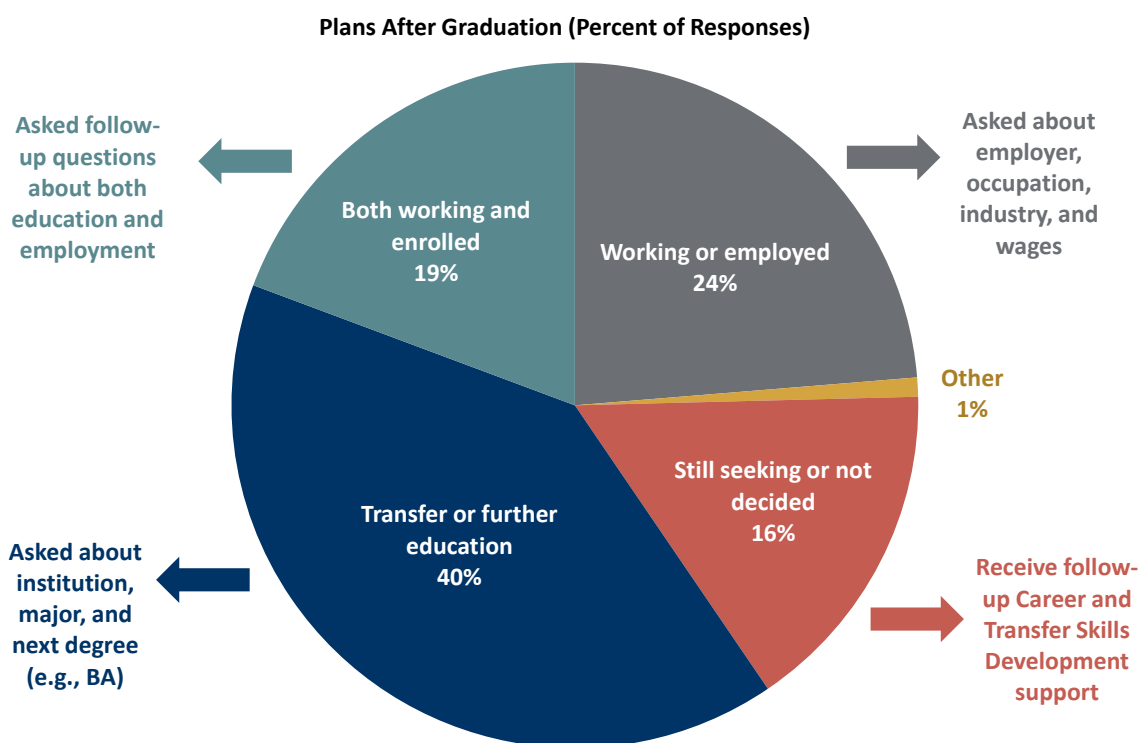
Sidebox 1: Who Completed this Year's First Destination Survey?

When interpreting survey results, it is important to consider how responses generalize to the full population. Who chooses to respond—and not respond—can bias results. In this year's First Destination Survey, some groups had significantly higher survey completion rates, including Black (relative to white), female, first generation, parenting, and Pell-eligible students, compared to their respective counterparts. The odds of completing the survey were also positively associated with GPA and age. P-TECH (Pathways in Technology Early College High School) graduates had significantly lower odds of completing the survey, as did graduates whose highest credential was a certificate or skills award (relative to an associate degree). Compared to graduates with a general Associate of Arts or Science degree, those in the schools of Engineering, Technology, Mathematics, and Sciences (ETMS) and Law and Public Service (LPS) also had significantly higher odds of completing the survey. To adjust for differences in response rates, response propensity weighting and proportional fitting were considered. However, due to sparse responses among some student groups, this report uses unweighted results. Caution should be taken when generalizing from respondents to all graduates, especially for groups with lower survey response rates.

Overall, around 84% of respondents know their next steps after graduation, with 24% planning to work, 40% planning to pursue further education, 19% planning to do both, 16% still seeking or not decided, and 1% pursuing other opportunities like military service or volunteering (Figure 3). Dallas College prides itself on empowering students to *find their next*. The 84% of students who *know their next* steps establishes a baseline that can be used to assess initial outcomes in future years—and the 16% of students who reported that they were undecided or still seeking could opt via the survey to connect with the Career and Transfer Skills Development team to aid in their career or education search. More than 150 students opted for support services this way.

Figure 3

Most Dallas College Graduates Know Next Steps, Majority Pursue Further Education



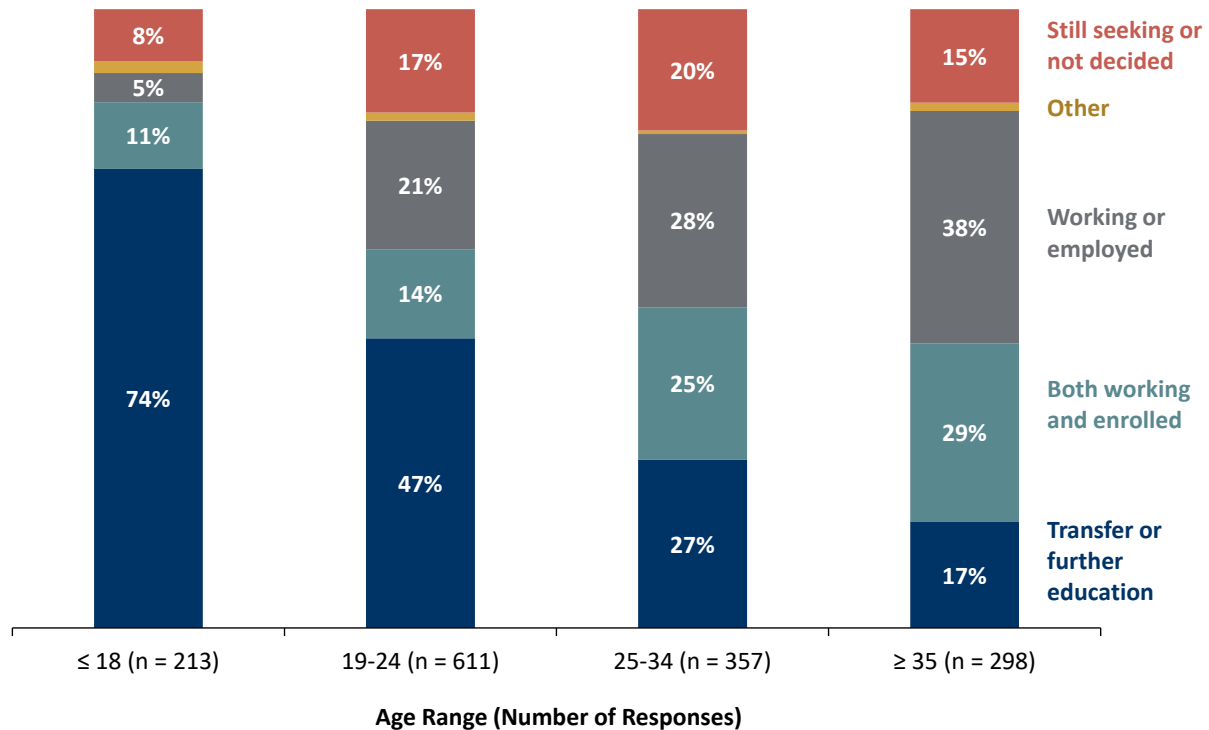
Sources: Dallas College; Research Institute calculations.

Note: Data reflect 1,479 graduates (13%) from Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 who completed a First Destination Survey.

One characteristic that shaped graduates' future plans was age. More than 85% of respondents who were 18 and younger planned to pursue further education, compared to 62% for the 19-24 age group, 51% for those aged 25-34, and 47% for respondents age 35 and older. As respondent age rose, so did the share who planned to work, and older respondents were more likely to be enrolled and employed simultaneously (Figure 4). While perhaps unsurprising, disaggregating data by age is important given the diverse learner populations Dallas College serves—everyone from dual enrolled high schoolers to older adults seeking to advance in or change their careers.

Figure 4

Younger Graduates Often Seek Further Education, Older Graduates Seek Employment



Sources: Dallas College; Research Institute calculations.

Note: Data reflect 1,479 graduates (13%) from Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 who completed a First Destination Survey.

Some credential completers were high schoolers who were enrolled in a dual credit, early college high school, or P-TECH program during the 2024-2025 academic year. In total, 135 respondents were high schoolers, largely belonging to the 18 and younger age group. Around 76% of high school respondents planned to enroll in further education or study, 4% planned to pursue employment, 10% planned to do both, 6% were still seeking or undecided, and 3% had other plans. The results suggest that few high school graduates, even those who already hold a credential, seek full-time employment, with many more opting to continue their studies instead.

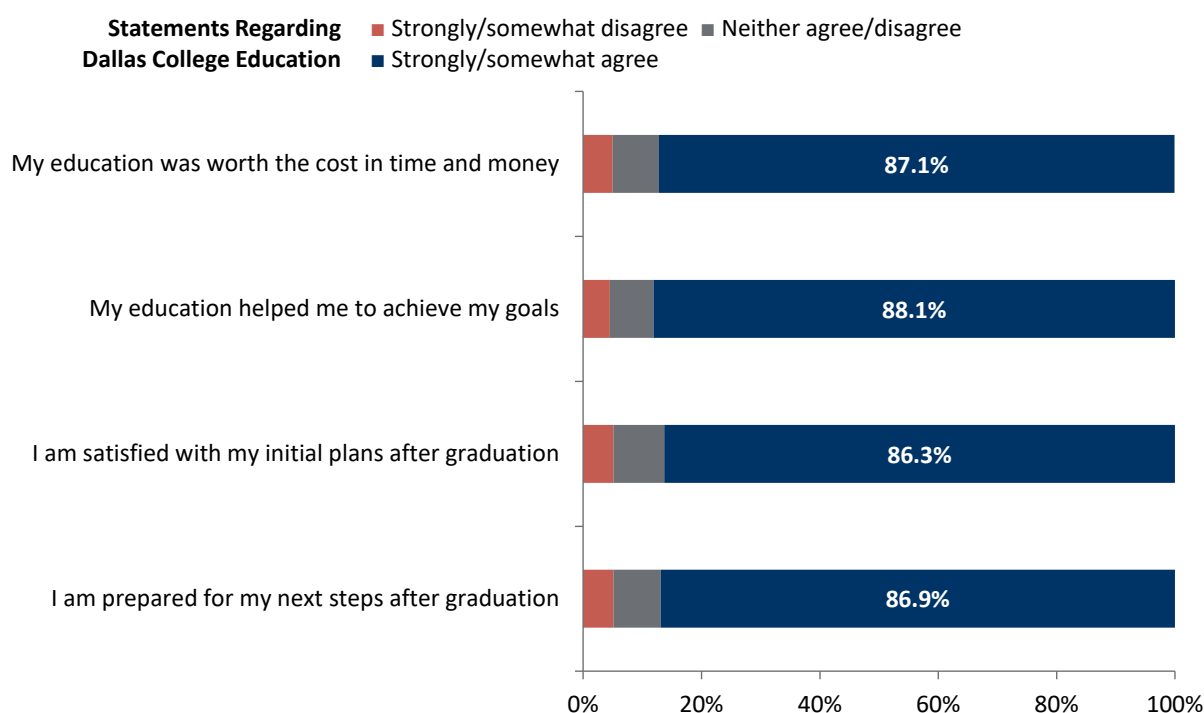
In addition to age, a [First Destination Dashboard](#) accompanying this report allows readers to further explore quantitative data from the survey, including results by graduation term, other student demographic characteristics, program of study, and more. After declaring their initial plans, respondents were then asked branching follow-up questions about where they planned to enroll or transfer, where they planned to work and in what sectors and occupations, and how satisfied they were with specific services and Dallas College overall. Students could also give open-ended feedback, in their own words, about their experience at Dallas College.

Overall Outcomes

To capture graduates' perceptions of their next steps, First Destination Survey respondents, no matter their future plans, were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with several statements about their Dallas College education, answering on a 5-point scale, where 1 was strongly disagree and 5 was strongly agree. The majority of respondents expressed agreement and positive sentiment, with a mean score of 4.1 out of 5 for every prompt. (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Dallas College Graduates Positively Perceive ROI, Goals, Satisfaction, & Preparedness



Sources: Dallas College; Research Institute calculations.

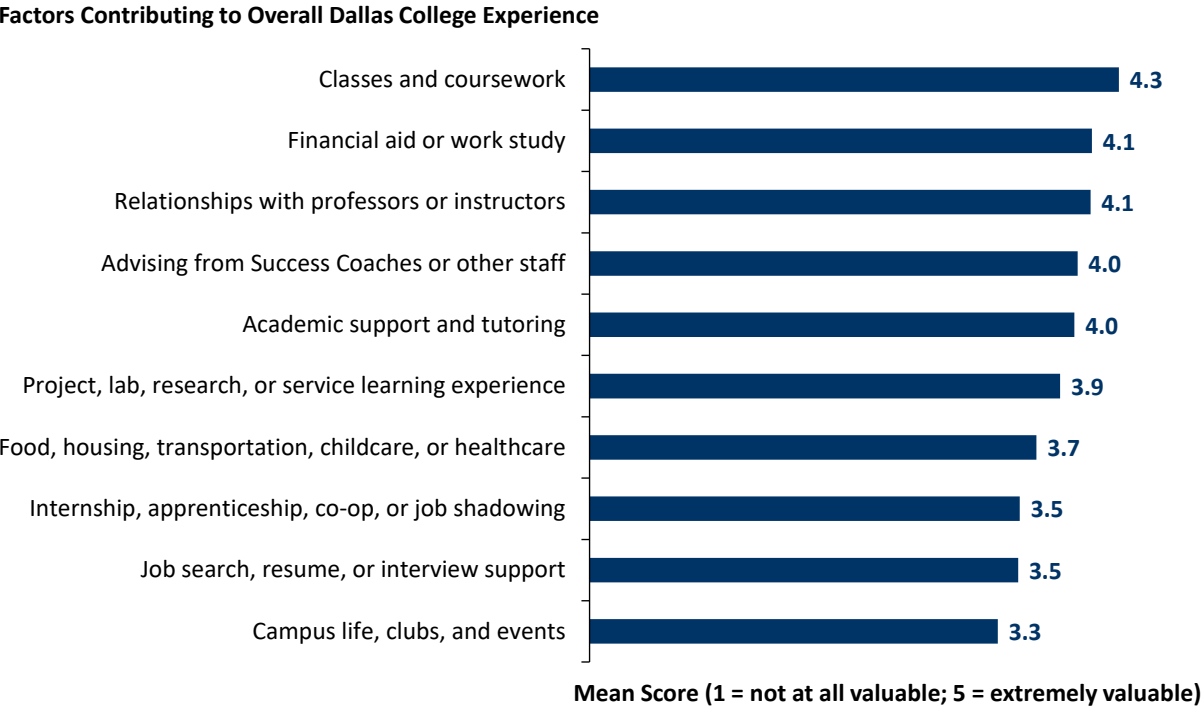
Notes: Responses reflect 1,479 graduates from Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 who completed a First Destination Survey. Responses are collapsed into top-2 and bottom-2 boxes. ROI stands for return on investment.

These feelings were largely reflected in open-ended feedback from respondents as well, with around two-thirds of comments being positive and one-third neutral or negative. Students were especially appreciative of faculty, and many expressed gratitude for their time at Dallas College. One student wrote, “I have truly enjoyed my time at Dallas College. It has made me a better student, role model, and parent.” Another wrote, “Thank you for this opportunity. I didn’t know how I was going to finish my college education and Dallas College was the answer!” Many students emphasized that professors cared and wanted their students to succeed.

Students also offered constructive feedback, asking for even greater career services support in securing employment within their chosen fields, additional evening class offerings, and timelier, clearer communications around key events like graduation. One student wrote, “Most people that go to Dallas College are older and have a job. Class availability in the evenings was good but could improve.” Another wrote, “As an international student, I would appreciate if there was more help with finding jobs and updating my resume.” Regarding graduation and the degree audit process, another student wrote, “Although I understand the process of receiving a diploma, there should be a better way without going through so many hoops.”

Respondents were also asked how valuable various experiences were to their overall experience at Dallas College, answering on a 5-point scale, where 1 was not valuable at all and 5 was extremely valuable; respondents had the option to select not applicable if the experience did not apply to them. Overall, classes and coursework, financial aid, and relationships with faculty and instructors were ranked as the most valuable experiences (Figure 6). Campus life, clubs, and events (especially for working adults based on open-response feedback), career services, and work-based learning opportunities showed the most opportunity for improvement.

Figure 6
Classes, Financial Aid, & Faculty Most Enhance Overall Experience of Dallas College



Sources: Dallas College; Research Institute calculations.
Notes: Responses reflect 1,479 graduates from Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 who completed a First Destination Survey. Responses are collapsed into mean scores from a 5-point scale.

Sidebox 2: In Their Own Words

Graduating students were given the opportunity to write in feedback for Dallas College on this year's First Destination Survey, and more than 500 had comments to share. Below are a few highlights of their stories and academic journeys. Comments have been edited for grammar, clarity, and to protect respondent privacy.

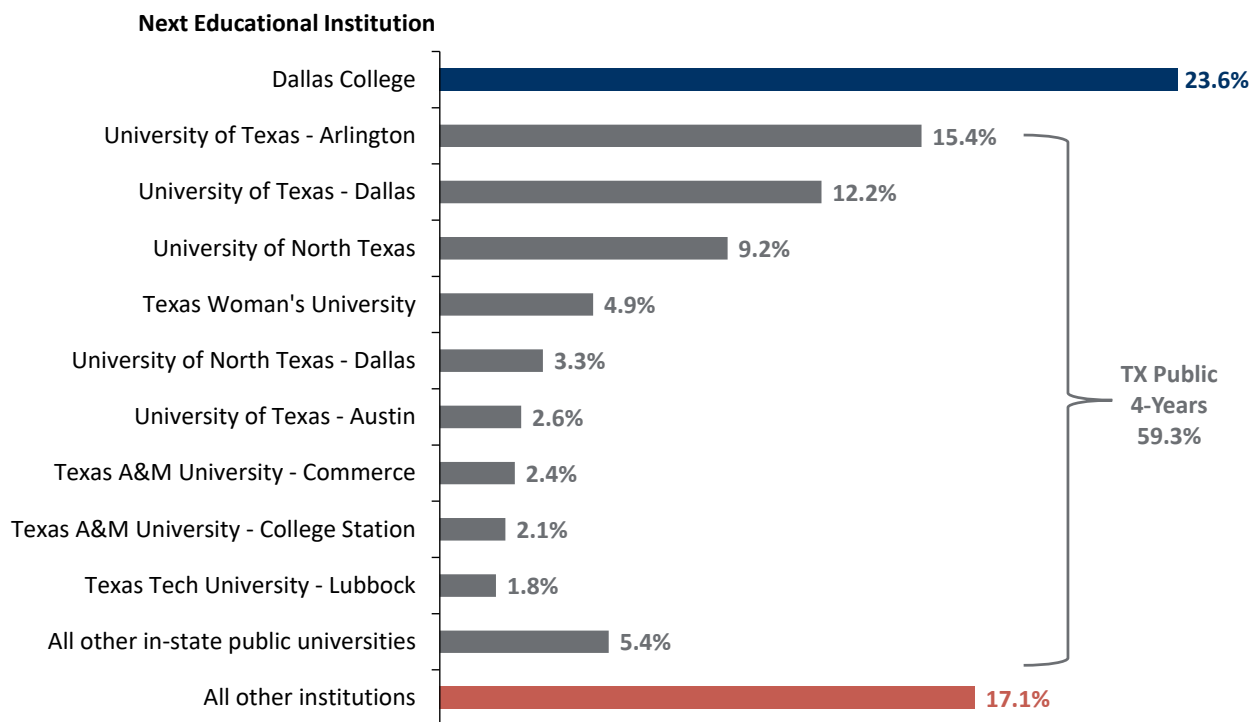
- *"I have encouraged so many, including my siblings and my children, to attend Dallas College. I have met wonderful people during my time with the school."*
- *"I am very grateful to Dallas College because, thanks to the aid they provided, I have been able to earn my degree and become the first in my family to do so."*
- *"I am going to miss all my wonderful professors and the Dallas College staff. Everyone was so amazing and supportive of me throughout my journey."*
- *"The instructors have left a huge impact on my life, and I am eternally grateful."*
- *"Thank you so much for this opportunity! My children will now have a great example for their future."*
- *"Thank you, Dallas College, for helping me pursue the career of my dreams."*
- *"I absolutely loved everything Dallas College did for me and others. I had the best experience here and I met amazing friends!"*
- *"Thank you Dallas College for giving me a quality education in a high-demand field and for helping me earn my degree debt-free!"*
- *"I have loved my time at Dallas College. Being back in school took some getting used to. But it was worth the ride."*
- *"Thank you for providing Dallas Promise! Without it my life would be entirely different, so I am so grateful I took on the opportunity for my future."*
- *"Loved it here! The experiences and resources dedicated to students from all backgrounds really help us succeed!"*
- *"Dallas College changed my life for the better and has helped me in many ways that many couldn't believe."*
- *"Thank you for the opportunity to kickstart my higher education! As a dual credit kid, this is honestly the best choice I've made for myself! Once again, thank you!"*

Transfer Outcomes

Many Dallas College students enroll with an intent to transfer or earn a bachelor's degree. A total of 877 responding graduates to this year's First Destination Survey plan to pursue further education, with 73% planning to be enrolled full-time (12 or more credit hours), 19% planning to be enrolled part-time, and 8% unsure of their future course load. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 63% of respondents who plan to pursue further education are traditional age (younger than 25), while 37% are adult learners (age 25 and older). As their next credential, around 79% of respondents who plan to pursue further education are seeking a bachelor's degree, with 6% seeking a license or certification, 6% pursuing an associate degree, 5% a graduate degree, and 3% a certificate. Surprisingly, nearly one-in-four respondents who intend to pursue further education plan to remain at Dallas College; in-state public universities, especially those nearby Dallas County, dominate respondents' other top educational destinations after Dallas College (Figure 7). Surprisingly, out of all respondents who plan to stay at Dallas College, only 6% were at P-TECHs or dual enrolled; those graduates mostly planned to transfer to other institutions.

Figure 7

Many Graduates Will Return to Dallas College or Transfer to In-State Public Universities



Sources: Dallas College; Research Institute calculations.

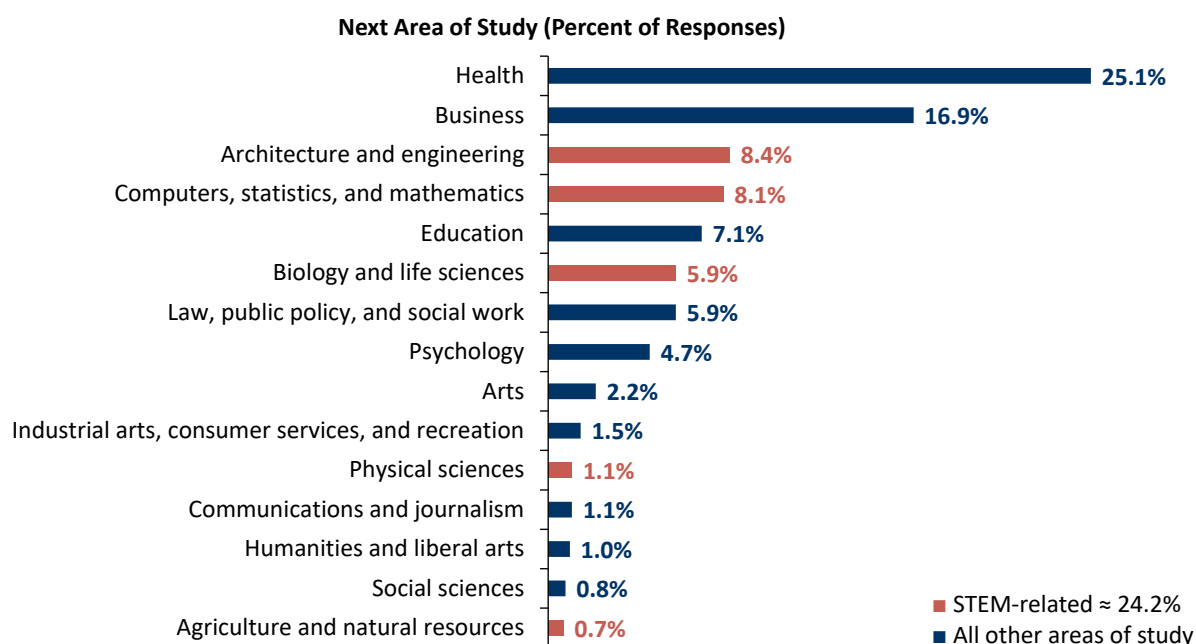
Note: Responses reflect 877 graduates from Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 who completed a First Destination Survey and indicated that they plan to pursue further education.

For students who plan to stay at Dallas College, 42% are pursuing a bachelor's degree, 26% an associate degree, 9% a certificate, 19% a license or certification, and 4% have other pursuits. The survey should be updated in future years to explore why students stay at Dallas College. Only credential awardees received this year's First Destination Survey, so results do not include students who plan to transfer before graduating and finish a degree elsewhere. Still, respondent transfer destinations align closely with the top destinations that Dallas College students transfer to when measured using lagging indicators like data from the National Student Clearinghouse.

Finally, respondents pursuing further education were asked what fields they planned to study as they continued their educational pursuits, grouped into fifteen broad categories. Overall, health, business, STEM, and education categories topped the list, fairly aligned with overall program enrollment at Dallas College (Figure 8). Less than 2% of students planned to pursue further studies in industrial arts, consumer services, and recreation, physical sciences, communications and journalism, humanities and liberal arts, social sciences, and agriculture and natural resources, potentially indicating an opportunity to invest in and boost transfer rates in these fields. Some transfer students in these fields may also be non-completers at Dallas College.

Figure 8

Dallas College Grads Plan Further Study in Health, STEM, Business, Education, & More



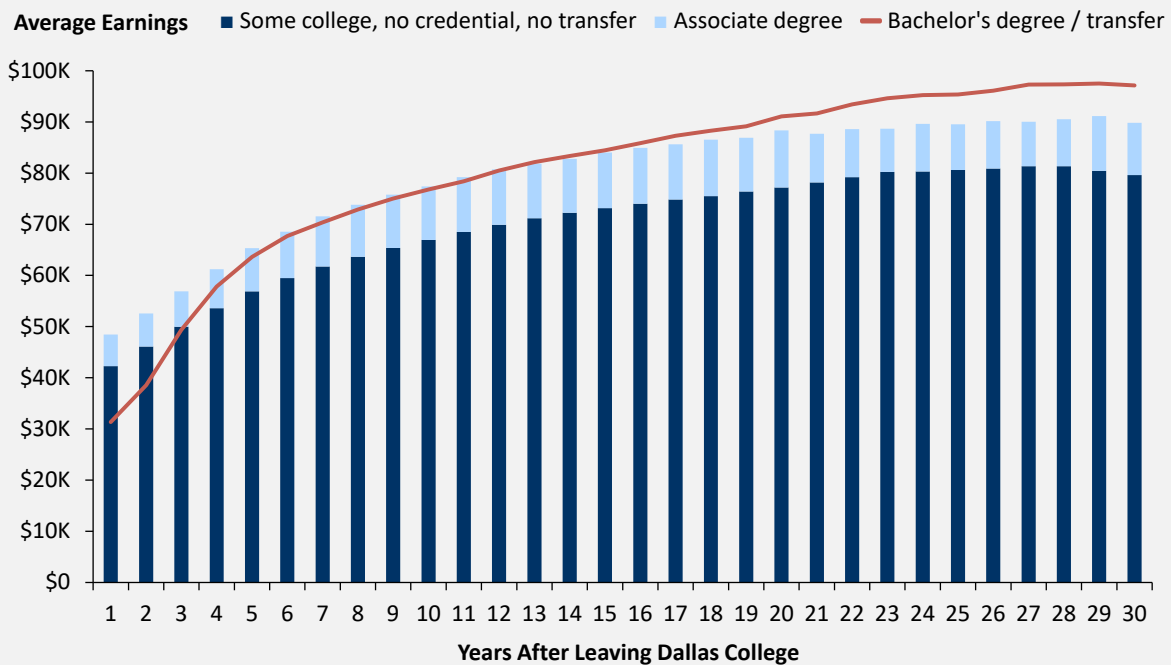
Sources: Dallas College; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board; Research Institute calculations.

Notes: Responses reflect 877 graduates from Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 who completed a First Destination Survey and indicated that they plan to pursue further education. 9.4% of respondents chose *Other*, which is not shown. Areas of study follow THECB groupings by 2-digit CIP (Classification of Instructional Program) code, with share in STEM-related (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields shown calculated approximately and excluding health sciences.

Sidebox 3: The Economic Benefits of Educational Attainment

For many Dallas College graduates, degree completion and vertical transfer are pathways to economic opportunity that unlock greater earnings over time. Using data from the Texas Education Research Center to track the average outcomes of students who exited Dallas College (or, in the past, Dallas County Community College District) from 1992-2022, the economic benefits of educational attainment are clear. Over a 30-year career, Dallas College associate completers earned around 14% more cumulatively than those with some college and no credential, and bachelor's completers, despite an initial earnings dip, earned around 15% more.

Degree Completion & Transfer Uplift Earnings Trajectories of Dallas College Students



Sources: Texas Education Research Center (ERC); Bureau of Labor Statistics; Research Institute calculations.

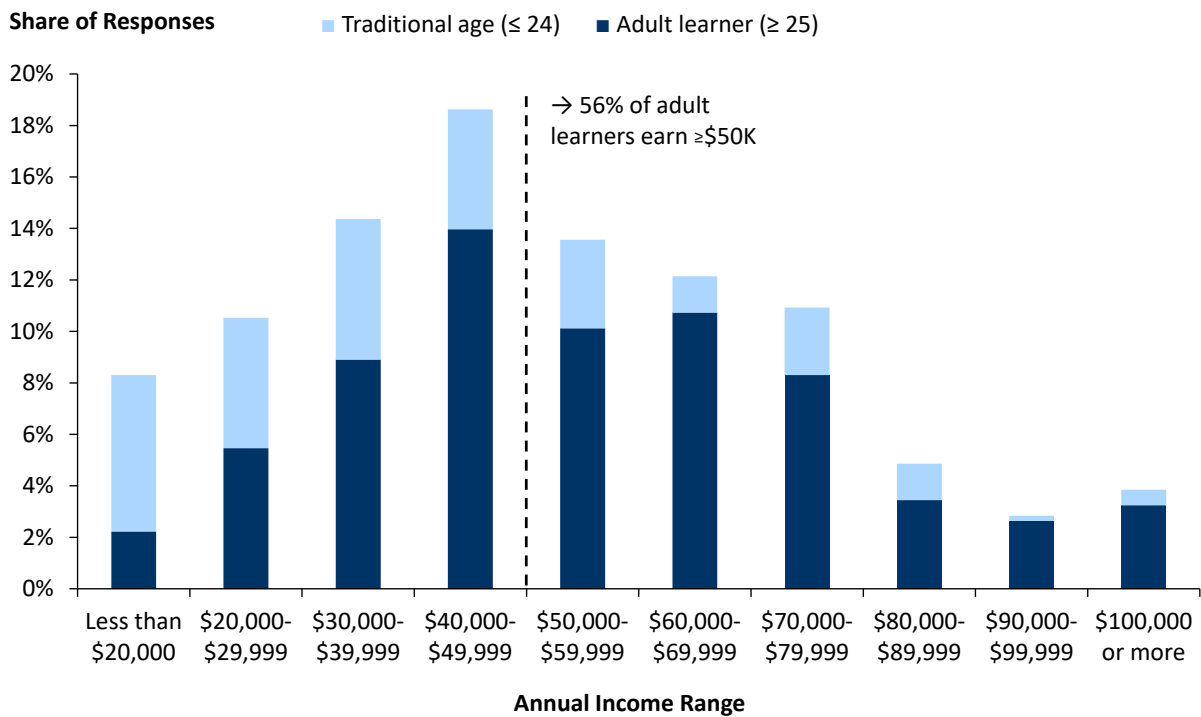
Notes: Earnings shown are average median annual earnings measured 1-30 years after leaving Dallas College for the 1992 to 2022 exit cohorts. All values are adjusted to 2025 dollars using CPI-U. Earnings data used are from the Texas Workforce Commission, which excludes out-of-state and self-employment, and covers around two-thirds of students.

Whether they choose to remain at Dallas College to continue their education or plan to transfer elsewhere, the high share of respondents building upon the knowledge and skills developed at Dallas College by pursuing further education bodes well for their career and economic outlook. As Dallas College expands its own bachelor's offerings, and as efforts like the Dallas Transfer Collaborative reduce frictions associated with transfer by introducing meta majors and centralizing resources, further advancement in the educational attainment of the college's students is expected in future cohorts. However, based on respondents' written survey feedback, reducing the logistical burdens associated with transfer and improving the accuracy and reliability of advising at Dallas College are key to bolstering transfer success.

Career Outcomes

Dallas College strives to award credentials of value and support students as they navigate their college-to-career transitions. On this year’s First Destination Survey, 634 respondents reported that they plan to continue or begin employment post-college, with 78% planning to work full-time (30 or more hours per week), 14% part-time, and 9% unsure. Among those who planned to work full-time, 69% were adult learners and 31% were traditional age. Adult learners had higher wages than traditional age students on average, with 56% of adult learners earning \$50,000 or more (Figure 9). Around 41% of adult learners earned \$60,000 or more, approaching Commit’s Dallas living wage target of \$64,095 in 2025 dollars. Commit’s goal is that by 2040, at least half of all 25-to-34-year-old residents of Dallas County, irrespective of race, will earn a living wage.

Figure 9
Initial Post-College Wages Vary by Age, but Most Adult Learners Earn \$50K+ Per Year



Sources: Dallas College; Research Institute calculations.
Note: Responses reflect 494 graduates (341 adult learners and 153 traditional age) from Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 who completed a First Destination Survey and indicated that they plan to work full-time.

Using the midpoint of each income range, including only respondents working full-time, and excluding those who earned less than \$10,000 or \$100,000 or more per year, mean earnings were roughly \$51,000 per year. For traditional age students, who are younger than 25, the mean

was around \$43,000 per year, and for adult learners, 25 and older, the mean was near \$54,000. Note that because respondents were only asked to provide a range of income, these values are approximate, assuming that each respondent earns within the middle of their selected range.

Sidebox 4: Defining Living Wages

Living wages, or the wages needed for a household to cover essential goods and services, can vary by region, family composition, and the data used to estimate essential expenses. Several data sources were considered when evaluating wages in this report, including the Postsecondary Value Commission, Commit Partnership, MIT Living Wage Calculator, ALICE Essentials Index, University of Washington Self-Sufficiency Standard, Texas Workforce Commission, and federal poverty guidelines. While we primarily reference the Commit Partnership's threshold in this report, we recommend that Dallas College review multiple options and align behind a single clear, transparent, and sustainable standard for a living, thriving, or community prosperity wage in its future strategic planning and goal setting.

In 2018, the [Commit Partnership](#), a nonprofit organization focused on education and economic opportunity in Dallas County, set a goal that by 2040, at least half of all 25-34-year-old residents in Dallas County, irrespective of race, will earn a living wage of \$50,000 per year. The organization adjusts this target annually for [CPI inflation](#), and the initial goal of \$50,000 was created based on [MIT Living Wage Calculator](#) estimates for Dallas County. Using Commit's methodology to adjust for inflation, the living wage in 2025 was \$64,095 per year in Dallas County, up from \$50,000 in 2018. Achieving Commit's target will require that Dallas College, districts, employers, and nonprofit partners all be part of the solution.

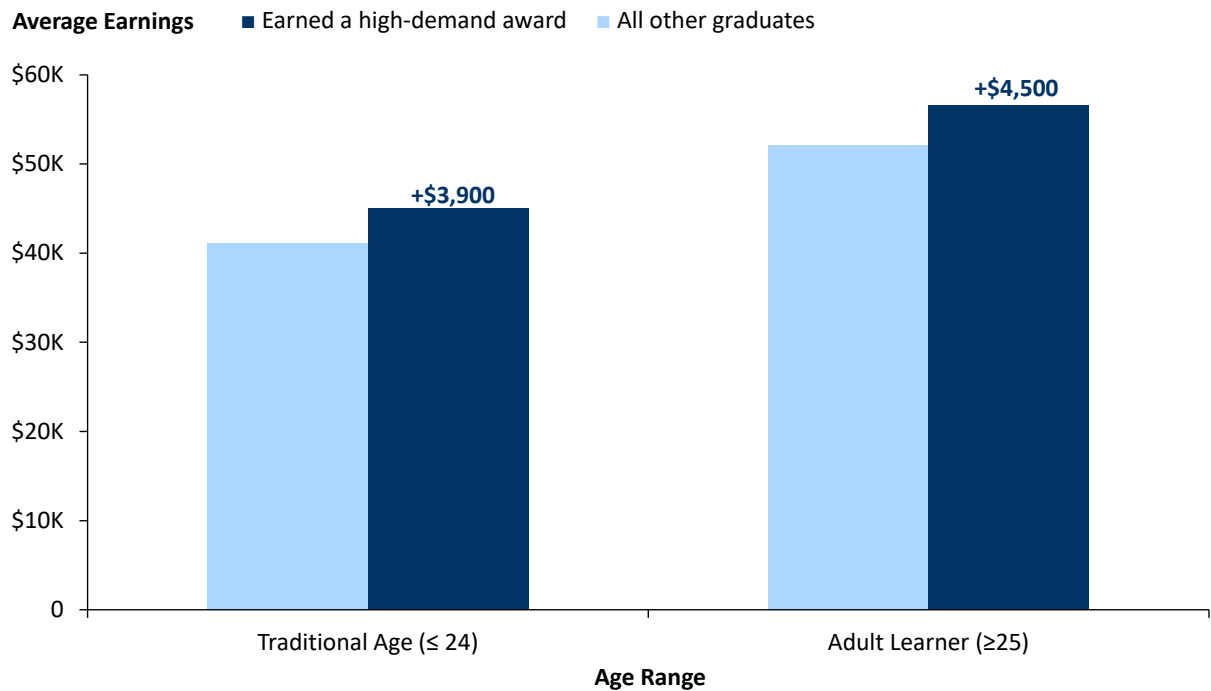
To put \$64,095 into context, we compare it to several other thresholds. Commit's living wage target is higher than the 2025 Living Wage Calculator thresholds for Dallas County for one adult with no children (\$47,965) or two working adults with two children (\$53,435), but lower than the threshold for a single parent with one child (\$78,978). Another standard we use for comparison is the Texas Workforce Commission's 2025 self-sufficient wage of \$78,133 in Dallas County, based on an average family size of 1.78 adults and 1.68 children. These values show that the definition of a living or self-sufficient wage can be wide-ranging. Ultimately, Commit's target was chosen for this report because it did not require detailed data on family composition, it was widely used by regional stakeholders, and it allowed for comparisons over time, since historical wage thresholds were unavailable from the Texas Workforce Commission prior to 2024 and Living Wage Calculator prior to 2014.

Survey respondents with employment plans could also select whether one or more of the following applied to their employment: 31% of respondents said that they would work for a new employer after graduation, 43% said their education would result in a career or field change, and 45% said their education would result in a promotion or raise. Respondents also

specified whether their employment fit into any of the following categories: 24% said that they would work an internship or fellowship after graduating, 17% planned to be self-employed, 15% had temporary contract work, 6% had freelance or gig work, and 34% said they planned to work multiple jobs. Given the large share of respondents who plan to work multiple jobs—more than a third—we recommend that the First Destination Survey include follow-up questions in future years to better understand the experience, motivations, and perceptions of this student group. These students may face extra time barriers in balancing work, school, and life responsibilities.

Programs are key for graduates’ wages to increase. While the college has limited control over the environmental conditions that graduates face, the First Destination Survey does point to a few potential levers that the college can use to boost the average graduate’s earnings: (1) graduating more students in high-demand fields and (2) placing more graduates in jobs aligned with their programs of study. High-demand fields fulfill critical areas of local or statewide labor market need. Among respondents entering the workforce, both traditional age and adult graduates realized higher earnings with a high-demand credential. For adult learners, the gap was around \$4,500 per year, while for traditional age students, it was around \$3,900 (Figure 10).

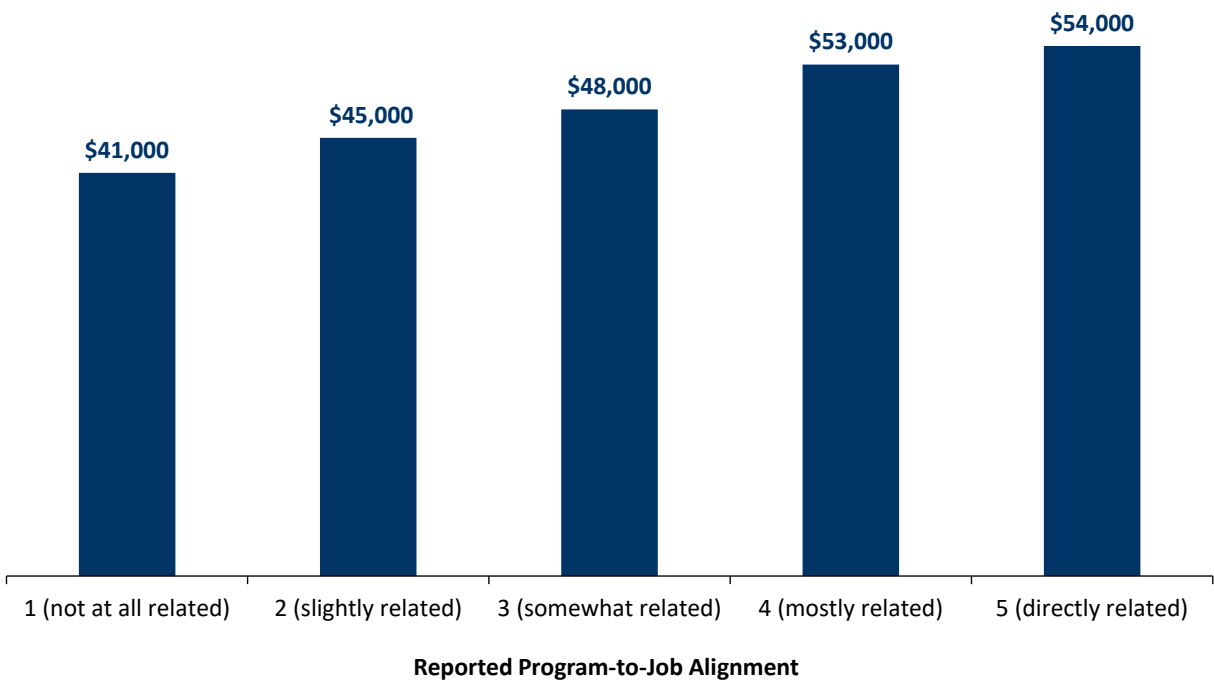
Figure 10
Awards in High-Demand Fields Support Higher Earnings for Dallas College Graduates



Sources: Dallas College; Research Institute calculations.
Notes: Responses reflect 494 graduates (341 adult learners and 153 traditional age) from Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 who completed a First Destination Survey and indicated that they plan to work full-time. Respondents answered with an income range (e.g., \$30,000-\$39,999) and average earnings are calculated using the midpoints of those ranges.

Another avenue to higher earnings was alignment between employment and program at Dallas College, with students earning more on average when their employment was related to their field of study. Respondents were asked the extent to which their job aligned with their Dallas College program, answering on a 5-point scale, where 1 was not at all related and 5 was directly related. Earnings increased steadily along this scale, with a \$13,000 per year difference between students whose jobs were directly related to their programs of study at Dallas College and those who felt their jobs were not at all related to their studies (Figure 11). This linear trend was seen primarily in adult learners, with greater variance in the outcomes of traditional age graduates.

Figure 11
Dallas College Grads with Direct Program-to-Job Alignment Report Higher Mean Wages



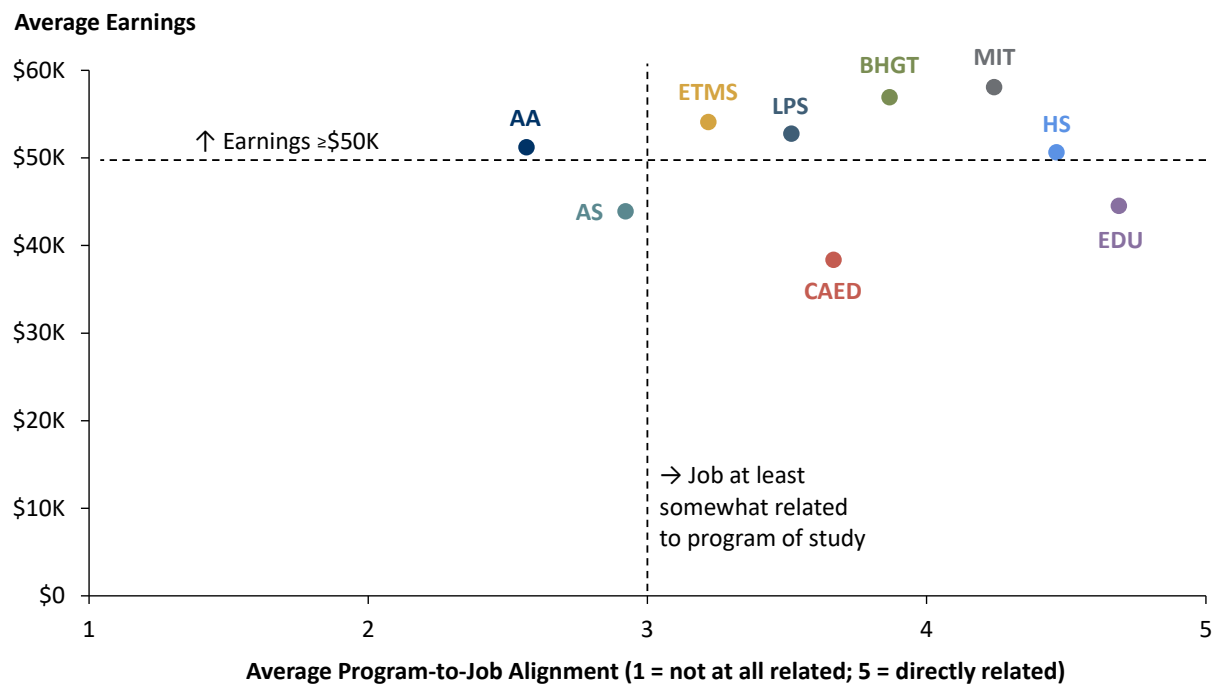
Sources: Dallas College; Research Institute calculations.
Notes: Responses reflect 494 graduates from Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 who completed a First Destination Survey and indicated that they plan to work full-time. Respondents answered with an income range (e.g., \$30,000-\$39,999) and average earnings are calculated using the midpoints of those ranges. Values are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Alignment between a student’s program and their employment varied by school of instruction. Excluding graduates with a general Associate of Arts (AA) or Associate of Science (AS) degree, graduates in the (1) School of Education (EDU) indicated the most program-to-job alignment, followed by the Schools of (2) Health Sciences (HS), (3) Manufacturing and Industrial Technology (MIT), (4) Business, Hospitality, and Global Trade (BHGT), (5) Creative Arts, Entertainment, and Design (CAED), (5) Law and Public Service (LPS), and (7) Engineering, Technology, Mathematics and Sciences (ETMS), with the caveat that CAED had a small number of respondents (Figure 12).

Students who graduated with a general AA or AS degree and were working full-time, perhaps unsurprisingly, reported lower levels of alignment between their studies and their employment. Directing these AA and AS students either toward transfer pathways or applied degrees suited to immediate employment, and further integration of marketable skills into Dallas College’s coursework, are a few potential strategies for increasing the relevance of these students’ academic experiences to their post-college pursuits. Interestingly, students with a general AA also earned more on average than those with a general AS, at \$51,000 per year versus \$44,000, perhaps indicating that the AA holds more value in the local labor market than the AS does.

Figure 12

Graduates' Mean Wages & Job Alignment Vary by Dallas College School of Instruction



Sources: Dallas College; Commit; Research Institute calculations.

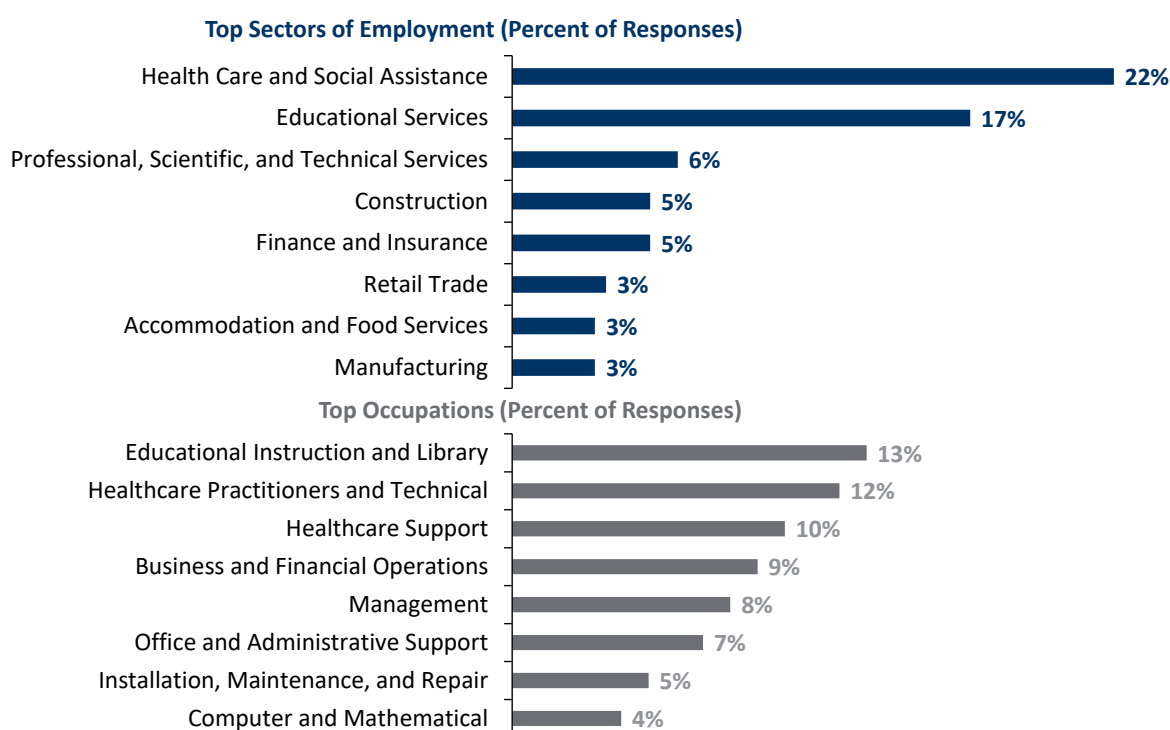
Notes: Responses reflect 494 graduates from Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 who completed a First Destination Survey and indicated that they plan to work full-time. Respondents answered with an income range (e.g., \$30,000-\$39,999) and average earnings are calculated using midpoints of those ranges. Credential levels are pooled within each school.

The schools with the greatest program-to-job alignment did not always have the highest wages. Average earnings for the School of MIT were highest, at \$58,000 per year, followed by BHGT (\$57,000), ETMS (\$54,000), LPS (\$53,000), HS (\$51,000), EDU (\$45,000), and CAED (\$38,000). It is important to note that these results include a mix of respondents across all ages, programs, and credential levels (i.e., certificate, associate, bachelor’s) within each school of instruction, so results should be interpreted with caution. In addition, small sample sizes precluded program-level analysis this year, but increased survey participation could allow for this in the future.

Respondents with employment plans were also asked to indicate their sector of employment and type of occupation, with responses corresponding to aggregate NAICS (North American Industry Classification System) and SOC (Standard Occupational Classification) categories, respectively. Occupational information is a unique contribution from the survey, because such data are unavailable in state administrative wage data from the Texas Workforce Commission. Overall, sector and occupation results largely corresponded to the schools of instruction with the highest in-field job placement rates. Health (23%) and education (18%) lead the sectors where respondents were employed, with similar results for occupations, which also included a number of business-related roles (Figure 13). Only the top eight responses are shown for both sectors and occupations, with more results in the [First Destination Dashboard](#). While they may seem parallel, sectors and occupations are distinct; for example, a scheduling assistant (office and administrative support occupation) could work at a hospital (in the health care and social assistance sector). More than 22% of respondents chose *other services* or did not know / were unsure of their sector of employment, and 9% were unsure of their occupation, suggesting that students may have some uncertainty in their job plans or have found the questions unintuitive.

Figure 13

Health, Education Lead Sectors of Employment & Occupations for Dallas College Grads



Sources: Dallas College; Research Institute calculations.

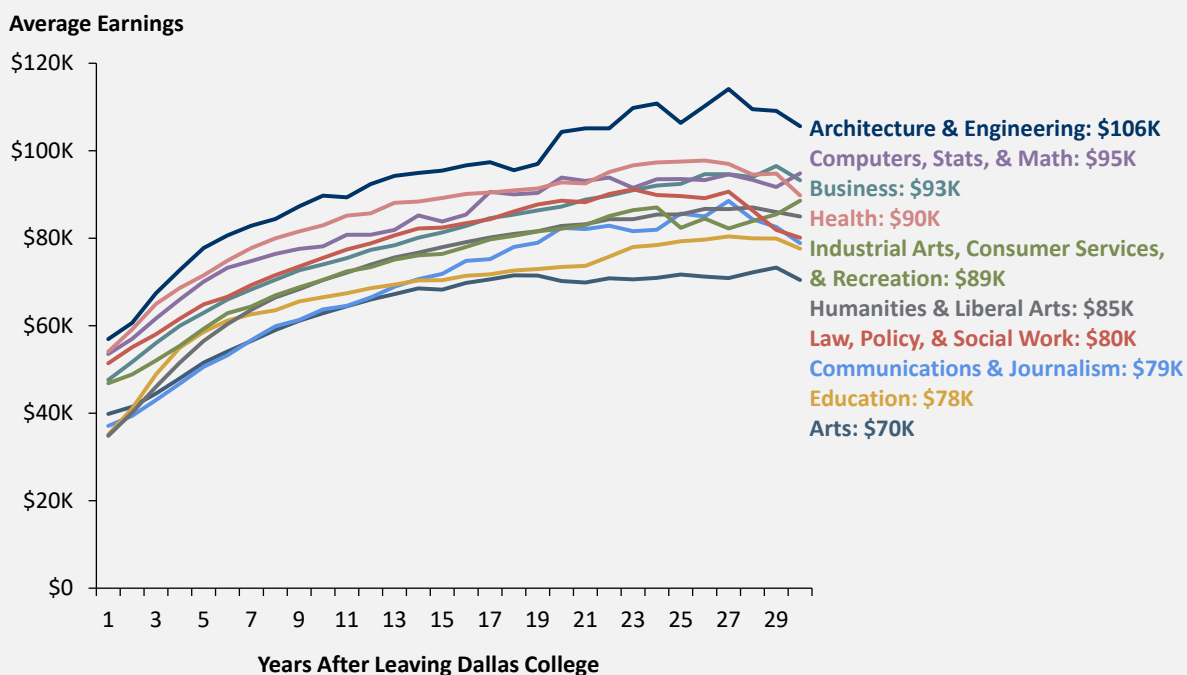
Note: Responses reflect 494 graduates from Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 who completed a First Destination Survey and indicated that they plan to work full-time.

Respondents could also indicate their specific employer and job title. Answers were varied, with more than 200 distinct employers and job titles written in. Top employers who hired multiple graduates included Dallas College itself, Dallas Independent School District, Baylor Scott & White, Parkland, Methodist, State Farm, and Chase. Many other school districts hired graduates, including Richardson, Garland, Plano, Mesquite, Irving, Duncanville, and Lancaster. Job titles were also wide-ranging, with teachers as the top response, followed by registered nurses, then veterinary staff. Multiple students also said that they planned to work as paralegals, pharmacy techs, sales associates, welders, HVAC techs, real estate agents, financial analysts, respiratory therapists, radiology techs, warehouse supervisors, accounting specialists, and cyber security professionals, reflecting the many ways that Dallas College connects to the regional economy.

Sidebox 5: Area of Study and Long-Term Outcomes

With the prevalence of careers in education and healthcare, many Dallas College graduates often gravitate toward caring professions with social impact, the full benefits of which are not always captured in their first paychecks. Over a 30-year career, however, data from the Texas Education Research Center from 1992-2022 show that Dallas College (and Dallas County Community College District) alumni earnings steadily rise over time across all areas of study.

Long-Term Earnings of Dallas College Students Rise Over Time, Vary by Area of Study



Sources: Texas Education Research Center; Bureau of Labor Statistics; Research Institute calculations.

Notes: Average earnings are calculated by taking a mean across the median earnings of each Dallas College exit cohort with available data during each year from 1992-2022, separated by area of study and pooled across credential levels. All wage values are adjusted to 2025 dollars using CPI-U.

Recommendations

Overall, data from the inaugural First Destination Survey reveal that Dallas College graduates hold largely positive views of their education, with most respondents knowing their next steps, feeling prepared, satisfied, and that college was worth the cost. Nevertheless, the survey also showed that Dallas College still has opportunities for improvement to ensure that even more students can fulfill their after-college goals. We outline three main recommendations below:

1. Improve and align college entry and exit data collection

While respondents to this year's First Destination Survey had largely positive perceptions of their Dallas College experience, we know little about the outcomes of students who did not respond. This year, survey participation was optional, and a very small team led outreach efforts over email, without access to text messaging, participant incentives, or a marketing campaign. We recommend that the survey be mandatory in future years, and that additional resources be allocated to its dissemination. Ideally, even non-completers who exit Dallas College could take the survey, offering perspective on their next steps and reasons for withdrawal or exit. Widening future survey participation will illuminate the full range of students' post-college outcomes with richer granularity, in turn supporting the review and streamlining of programs and pathways.

Additionally, we suggest further aligning the First Destination Survey with other data collection efforts that begin earlier in a student's educational journey, including at the time of first entry to Dallas College. For example, wider adoption of the college's Student Information Profile survey, which captures information about student intentions and goals, could enable a longitudinal view of student outcomes from entry to exit when paired with First Destination Survey data. While departments sometimes administer surveys independently, the college needs systematic data to understand the student journey from matriculation to commencement—and beyond. Information from entry and exit surveys should be fully integrated with the college's Learner Care Model and case management records, enabling a holistic look at a student's overall story.

2. Adopt and prioritize unified definitions of post-college success

Dallas College is focused on barrier busting to open doors of economic opportunity for students. However, this year's survey revealed that clearly defining post-college success remains elusive. Especially when it comes to earnings and financial outcomes of college, a wide range of success criteria exist—more than a high school graduate, enough to recoup costs of education, above a living wage cutoff, and so on, measured at different timepoints, recorded for different programs and student populations. While technical details of these criteria are important, perhaps even more critical is developing a consensus within the college around a shared standard of success.

We recommend that the research units in the college's Student Success division collaborate to propose options for a successful wage standard to the Chancellor and other college leadership.

Furthermore, Dallas College should consider integrating post-college outcomes into its strategic pillars, goals, and key performance indicators (KPIs). While the college's student success pillar already includes a goal focused on completion and post-completion success, the related KPIs emphasize transfer rates, graduation rates, and number of credentials awarded – these do capture completion, but not necessarily what happens after college. First Destination Survey data, like the share of students who know and are satisfied with their next steps, the share of adult learners meeting a successful wage standard, or the share of traditional age students entering bachelor's programs, could empower the college to track student success after exit, if response rates can be increased. Wage data from the Texas Workforce Commission, although lagged by 1-2 years, could also be used for goal setting, as these cover around 67% of students.

3. Continue to expand career services and adult learner offerings

Both quantitative and qualitative data from this year's First Destination Survey showcase an unmet demand for career services support. While they were still perceived fairly positively, job search, resume, and interview help, along with internships / work-based learning, were among the lowest ranked aspects of respondents' Dallas College experience. Availability, visibility, and uptake of these services could be improved through additional staffing and wider adoption of existing career navigation tools. Respondents' open-ended feedback also underscored a desire for career support services. Around 150 students directly asked for help in their career or transfer search through the survey form itself. In future years, a protocol must be developed to immediately connect such students to the full range of resources available to them. In addition, survey data should be used to allow the college's Employer Resource Center to partner with employers who are actively hiring graduates and paying them livable, sustainable wages, and should also be used to make the case for high-demand, in-field job placement for graduates.

The survey also surfaced a desire for more programming catered to the needs of working adults (age 25 and older). This was expressed in several different ways. Campus life, clubs, and events were the lowest ranked aspect of the Dallas College experience, and adult learners gave written feedback asking for more opportunities to engage, connect, and network with their peers while managing their busy schedules. They also voiced a demand for additional evening and weekend course offerings, not just online, which would make it easier for them to balance work, school, and other responsibilities. While the college has made great strides in busting barriers through its Student Care Network, we recommend that it continue to consider opportunities to enhance career services, affinity building, and course and event scheduling among its adult learners.

Conclusion

Dallas College is more than a place where students go to earn credentials. It is a launchpad for aspirations—for first generation learners, working parents, career changers, and traditional age students alike. This report affirms that many Dallas College students are rising: transferring to universities, entering high-demand careers, and building lives of purpose and stability. But it also reveals how steep the climb can be. Around 16% of First Destination Survey respondents don't have a clear picture of what their next steps are. Many students are seeking additional career services support. More than one third are working multiple jobs. And while students are largely satisfied with their outcomes, their average earnings are too often below regional living wage thresholds. These are not challenges Dallas College can solve alone, but they are ones that it must continue to address boldly, in partnership with employers and its broader community.



This year's First Destination Survey also captures hopeful momentum. Most respondents want to further their education, aspiring to earn bachelor's degrees and beyond. High-demand and field-aligned job placement show promising economic outcomes. And student perceptions of their academic experiences, relationships with faculty, and financial aid are all overwhelmingly positive. Looking ahead, Dallas College must continue to expand outcomes data coverage, make post-college outcomes a strategic priority, scale effective career advising, and align programs with employer needs. This work is necessary so that all students—no matter their background—are able to not only *find their next*, but to thrive in it.

Finding Their Next (2025)



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