



2018 Ascendium Education Philanthropy Report Highlights \$107 Million in New Grants

Our newly published philanthropy annual report, *Clearing the Path*, describes our 2018 grantmaking, which funds projects aimed at increasing postsecondary education and workforce training access and success among historically underrepresented learners. While most of the grants highlighted in the new report were awarded while we were still known as Great Lakes, *Clearing the Path* is our first annual report to be published under the Ascendium banner, so naturally we're excited to share it with all of our partners and allies across the field.

2018 was a pivotal year for us, as we transitioned from Great Lakes to Ascendium, said Vice President – Education Philanthropy Amy Kerwin, "But while we have a new name, our commitment to meaningful reforms remains unchanged, and the \$107 million in new funding we awarded last year was the largest annual total in our history. We're grateful to our grant partners for the opportunity to play a role supporting their efforts to address the difficult challenges so many students face."

Clearing the Path details grant projects that touch each stage of the student journey, from enrollment through completion. Focus areas spotlighted in the report include improving higher education in prison; increasing community college graduation rates; and boosting success among adult Latino students. The report also foreshadows our new funding priorities for the next three to five years, which we will unveil later this spring.

[Read our 2018 Education Philanthropy Report.](#)



Last-Dollar Grants and Informational Campaigns Help Increase Summer Enrollment

Many community college students enroll on and off, and the more time they spend away from their studies, the less likely they are to graduate. Research on academic momentum by Dr. Paul Attewell at the City University of New York suggests that students at two-year colleges who take summer courses during their first year are more likely to graduate within five years.

To learn more about how colleges can encourage students to enroll in summer courses, we made a \$3.3 million research grant to MDRC in 2017 to study the impact of two interventions – last-dollar grants and informational campaigns. In early 2019 MDRC published [a report](#) showing that for a small investment, colleges that encouraged summer enrollment helped students make progress toward their degree. We are hopeful other community colleges will adopt these proven practices. [Read more.](#)



Creating More Welcoming Campus Environments to Foster Student Success

Postsecondary education is more than just coursework. Students' day-to-day experiences on campus contribute to their success, and if they don't feel welcome they are less likely to stay enrolled and graduate. While many student success initiatives have focused on faculty relationships with students, front-line staff have largely been left out of the conversation. To help colleges cultivate stronger connections between front-line staff and students, the Institute for Evidence-Based Change (IEBC) developed the Caring Campus initiative.

Through intensive coaching, Caring Campus works with colleges to identify opportunities for staff engagement, conduct engagement surveys, define metrics to measure success, develop ways to enhance staff-student communication and create plans to monitor progress. In 2018, Caring Campus launched at several community colleges in southern California. Earlier this year we made [a \\$1 million grant to IEBC](#) to support their work with 20 additional colleges across the country.



Spotlighting Commitment to Latino Student Success with Seal of Excelencia

Excelencia in Education's Seal of *Excelencia* aims to accelerate the number of Latino students attaining college degrees by 2030. The Seal is a voluntary certification to recognize institutions intentionally serving Latino students for success based on leadership, evidence-based practices and the use of data. *Excelencia* is also providing technical assistance for a network of institutions committed to sharing and improving their efforts in serving Latino students.

An investment from Ascendium contributed to the creation of the Seal of *Excelencia* through the [Accelerating Latino College Completion \(ALCC\) Project](#), in which a network of nine institutions from Arizona, Florida and Texas examined what it means to be a Hispanic-serving institution.

Excelencia plans to announce the inaugural cohort of Seal of *Excelencia* recipients on June 20. That also happens to be the date of the organization's *Quinceañera*, or 15th anniversary, celebration, of which Ascendium is proud to be a sponsor. [Read more](#) about the Seal of *Excelencia* and technical assistance opportunities.