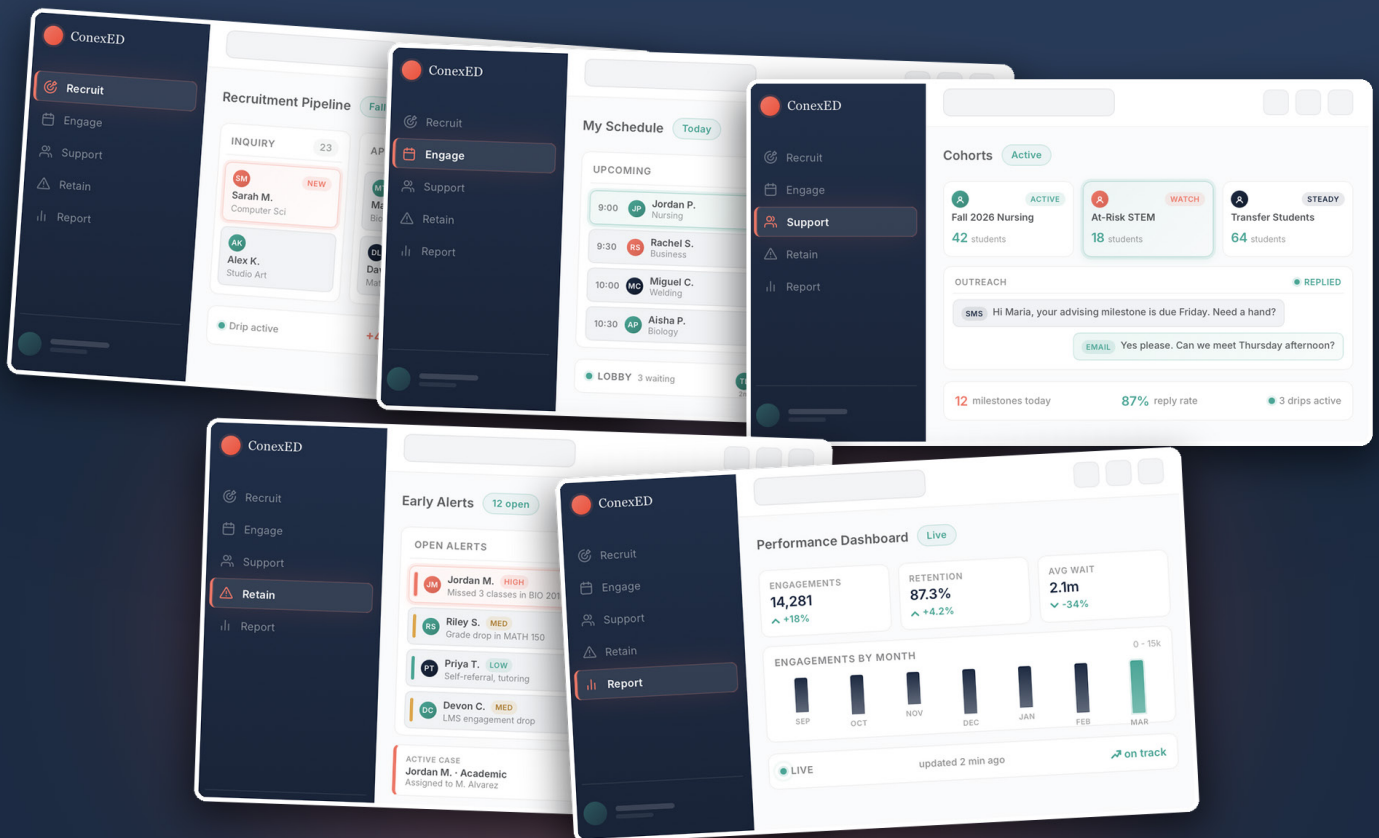


One System or 17?

Solving the Fragmentation and Data Crisis in Student Support



Hosting Organizations

Community College Think Tank and Strategic Solutions (CCTTSS)

CCTTSS is a bold, future-focused catalyst for innovation in higher education leadership. Working directly with community college CEOs, CCTTSS delivers cutting-edge, high-impact insights and strategies tailored to the complex realities of today's executive leadership. Through immersive Think Tanks, CCTTSS facilitates deep, creative problem-solving and breakthrough solutions for the sector's most pressing challenges.



ConexED

ConexED is a Student Success Platform built to connect students to every resource, service, and support they need, from first inquiry through graduation and beyond. Serving hundreds of institutions, it integrates CRM, scheduling, case management, early alerts, campaign automation, and analytics in a single platform connected to the institution's SIS and LMS. It replaces the fragmented, siloed experience that costs institutions enrollment, retention, and impact with one seamless, data-informed journey. As CEO Travis Prince put it, recruiting, engaging, supporting, and retaining students requires one platform, not seventeen.

LIFT – Leadership Institute for Tomorrow

Housed at CSU Fullerton, the Leadership Institute for Tomorrow (LIFT) is a one-of-a-kind leadership development initiative advancing diverse higher education leaders through immersive institutes, mentoring, research, and custom-designed programs. At the forefront of technology and innovation, LIFT equips professionals at all levels to drive transformational change, advance student success, and strengthen institutions nationwide.



The American Association of Community Colleges

AACC is the primary advocacy organization for the nation's community colleges. The association represents more than 1,000 2-year, associate degree-granting institutions and nearly 12 million students. AACC strives to:

- Provide a national voice and advocacy for the community college mission.
- Serve as a national information resource.
- Create opportunities for peer networking and interaction at all levels, professional initiatives, dialogue, and community-building.
- Facilitate collaboration among AACC staff and stakeholders.
- Encourage a shared commitment to the community college movement.
- Offer leadership and career development opportunities.

Setting the Stage

The student experience with support services at most community colleges is fragmented, confusing, and inconsistent, not because institutions lack commitment, but because they have accumulated technology, processes, and organizational structures over years, that were never designed to work together. The average institution now manages a sprawling ecosystem of seventeen or more separate platforms, each holding a different piece of the student's story. No single advisor, no single dashboard, and certainly no student can see the whole picture.

On April 13, 2026, community college CEOs and senior executive leaders gathered at the AACC Annual Conference in Seattle, Washington for a CEO Think Tank sponsored by ConexED and hosted by CC Think Tank & Strategic Solutions and LIFT. Moderated by Dr. Ding-Jo Currie and Dr. Pam Walker, the session was facilitated around three imperatives: confronting the fragmentation crisis honestly, generating bold and scalable solutions, and identifying actionable first moves that leaders could take back to their campuses immediately.

ConexED CEO Travis Prince opened with a diagnostic framing that resonated immediately with the room: a nationwide AI analysis of 31 college systems across 26 states found that 85% face at least three of the four most common student-support system failures simultaneously. More strikingly, 69% of those institutions are not simply asking to replace an existing tool; they are asking for capabilities they have never had. The takeaway was clear: this is a structural design challenge, and it calls for structural design solutions.



AI is already here. The question is whether you're ready."

- James Baldwin

17+

Average platforms in a typical
community college tech stack

85%

College systems facing 3 or
more simultaneous
student-support failures

69%

Colleges seeking systems
with capabilities they have
never had before

The Landscape: What CEOs NEED to Know

The technology landscape facing community colleges has grown exponentially more complex. In 2011, the marketing and enrollment technology sector comprised 150 feature products across 41 categories. By 2025, that number had exploded to 15,384 feature products across 52 categories, growing by an average of three new products per day. For institutions already stretched thin on staff, budget, and time, navigating this landscape is not a competitive advantage. It is an administrative burden.

The real cost is not the licensing fee for each platform. The hidden cost shows up in missed enrollment opportunities, lower retention and completion rates, inconsistent student experiences, advisor burnout and turnover, and lost institutional impact. As ConexED's AI analysis of statewide systems confirmed, the pain points are consistent across geographies: fragmented systems and manual workarounds, advisor overload, data silos with multiple conflicting sources of truth, and insufficient cross-institutional visibility. The data confirms this is not isolated, it is systemic.

The economic stakes are significant. Dr. Steven Gonzales, then Chancellor of Maricopa Community Colleges, raised this in the session, citing Arizona research that increasing the state's postsecondary enrollment by just 20% could generate more than \$5 billion in economic and social gains per cohort, per year¹. When fragmented systems drive students away, the loss is not just institutional, it is civic.

THE LANDSCAPE

The student-support tech stack has exploded, about three new products every day.

2011

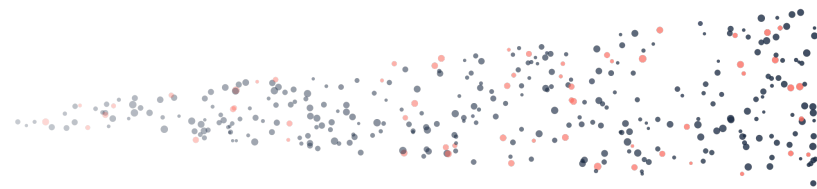
150

edtech products

2025

15,384

edtech products



DID YOU KNOW? #1

Most community colleges run as an accidental archipelago: dozens of separate data islands (Financial Aid, the Registrar, Workforce, the Foundation, and more) that rarely share one source of truth. When systems don't talk, students end up stitching their own records together, and new tools just automate the fragmentation. Connecting those islands is what turns 17 systems into one.

DID YOU KNOW? #2

Administrative friction falls hardest on the students aid is meant to help. Every extra form, login, and verification step is another place Pell-eligible and first-generation students drop off, and one landmark study found that simplifying the aid application raised enrollment by about 8 percentage points.¹ For students juggling work and family, friction isn't a nuisance, it's weight the institution should be removing.

DID YOU KNOW? #3

Scattered data doesn't just slow reporting, it weakens the decisions built on it. Gartner estimates poor data quality costs organizations an average of \$12.9 million a year, with inconsistency across siloed systems the hardest problem to solve.² When data is connected and current, reporting stops being a monthly cleanup and starts being a decision advantage.

DID YOU KNOW? #4

Ghost students, "AI-generated identities that harvest financial aid and a .edu email, are hitting community colleges hard: California flagged roughly 1 in 4 applications as fraudulent and lost about \$13 million, and the U.S. Department of Education has tied 150,000 suspect identities to about \$90 million in aid.³ Every disconnected system is one more door to defend, which is why a single, governed platform is now a security advantage, not just an operational one.

5+

Disconnected systems holding a single student's data

22%

Credits lost transferring to a four-year institution¹

10-15%

Of newly enrolled community college students leave before the census date.⁴

\$12.9M

Average annual cost of poor data quality³

THEME 1 · ONE SYSTEM: Unified Student Support Platform

Connecting the Data, Systems, and Services Around Every Student

The Think Tank opened its ideation with the most urgent operational question facing community college presidents: How do we stop the student from getting lost between our own systems? The fragmented tech stack; a different platform for recruitment, advising, financial aid, scheduling, early alerts, case management, and analytics. This does not just create inefficiency for staff. It creates confusion, delay, and disengagement for the students who can least afford it.

Participants articulated what leaders across the country are describing in parallel: the desire for a single location where all student information lives, regardless of which department is accessing it. An advisor, a financial aid officer, a faculty member, and a recruiter should all see the same student, and that student should never have to repeat their story. This is not a feature request. It is a fundamental redesign of how the institution presents itself to the people it serves.

The Student Service Hub concept with a centralized, one-stop service center where staff have immediate access to comprehensive student data and can address any inquiry without transferring the student emerged as the clearest articulation of this vision. It rejects the departmental silo as the organizing principle of student support and replaces it with the student journey as the organizing principle.



Key Ideas Emerged

- **One unified platform to recruit, engage, support, retain, report:** Replace the fragmented multi-system stack with a single platform that connects CRM, scheduling, case management, early alerts, campaign automation, and analytics, all integrated with the SIS and LMS.
- **Student Service Hub as one-stop, no transfers:** Establish a centralized service center where any staff member can access comprehensive student data and address any inquiry completely; whether academic, financial, or logistical, without referring to student elsewhere.
- **Single source of truth for the student record:** End the era of multiple conflicting data sources. One student record, accessible to advisors, financial aid, faculty, and administrators with appropriate tiered permissions and real-time updates.
- **AI-powered early-alert and intervention:** Deploy predictive AI that identifies enrollment drop-off risk, disengagement signals, and academic difficulty, triggering proactive outreach automatically.
- **24/7 AI Concierge as the always-on front door:** Provide students with around-the-clock access to a multilingual AI concierge that answers questions, connects to resources, completes tasks, and escalates to humans when needed, in any language, at any hour.
- **Eliminate manual workarounds:** Remove the invisible tax of manual data entry, duplicate records, and system-switching that consumes advisor time and erodes the quality of student interactions.





What if your institution had to operate with only ONE system? What would it be?

What if SIS, LMS, and MIS no longer existed as separate systems at all? What would that look like?

If organizational silos did not exist, how would we design the student support experience from scratch?

What if your org chart disappeared tomorrow? Would students notice an improvement?

If a student has to repeat their story twice, is that a system failure?

ONE SYSTEM

Seventeen systems resolve into one student record.



BIG IDEA

The Student Service Hub: One Door, One Record, One Journey.

The most compelling and immediately actionable idea from this theme was the Student Service Hub: a physical and digital convergence point where every staff member has access to the complete student picture and the authority to help, without requiring a transfer, callback, or a 'that's not my department' response. Participants envisioned a model where the student's journey is the organizing principle of institutional design, not departmental jurisdiction. The Hub is not just a technology solution; it is a cultural one. It requires institutions to decide that the student's experience of navigating support is as important as the quality of any individual service.

THE RISK	THE MITIGATION
Legacy systems and data silos cannot be integrated overnight; transition risk is real	Phase the rollout: student-facing touchpoints first, back-end systems second.
Staff resistance to unified platforms can undermine adoption even when technology is sound	Involve frontline advisors in platform selection; train for shared ownership, not just software.
Single-platform dependency creates institutional vulnerability if the vendor fails or pivots	Negotiate data portability and exit terms in every contract; keep student data owned and exportable.
Comprehensive student data access raises FERPA compliance complexity	Build role-based access controls from day one; make FERPA a design requirement, not an afterthought.
AI concierge tools may provide inaccurate information, eroding student trust	Keep humans in the loop on escalations; audit AI responses and publish accuracy metrics.

FIRST MOVE: DO THIS IN THE NEXT 30 DAYS

Conduct a system audit: list every technology platform currently used to manage student interactions at your institution; from first inquiry through alumni engagement. Count them, then ask your team: how many of these talk to each other in real time? The gap between the total number and the integrated number is your fragmentation score. Share it with your cabinet. That number is the beginning of your consolidation roadmap.

THEME 2 · THE COMPETENCY REVOLUTION: From Credits to Skills

Anchoring Skills, Evidence, and Mastery in One Portable Record

The Think Tank's most structurally ambitious conversations centered on the fundamental unit of educational currency: the credit hour and the letter grade. Participants challenged both with a directness that reflected a shared urgency. Some institutions offer more than one hundred degree programs, many of which have graduated fewer than five students in five years, with those graduates earning \$30,000 or less. When a degree or certificate does not lead to a credential of value, the institution has failed both the student and itself.

The alternative proposed across multiple groups was a competency-based education (CBE) model, framed not as a niche program but as a full institutional redesign. Rather than organizing education around time-in-seat and grade distribution, CBE organizes it around demonstrated mastery of skills that employers recognize and value. The student's journey begins not with a course catalog, but with a career aspiration and a map from where they are to where they want to go.

The Skills Portfolio concept extended this idea into a portable, lifelong asset: a comprehensive record of what a student knows and can demonstrate, organized not by course or transcript but by capability. Multiple groups converged on the analogy of a medical record portable across institutions, maintained across career stages, owned by the individual. Rather than asking 'Did you take English 101?' the employer and the institution ask 'What can you do, and can you prove it?'

Key Ideas Emerged

- **Full CBE model; competency replaces credit hours:** Redesign all degree and certificate programs around demonstrated competencies rather than seat time, replacing the A-F grading system with mastery verification tied to employer-recognized skill standards.
- **Career-first design:** Start with aspirations, not a course catalog: Begin every student's journey with a career goal and build a customized academic and non-academic success plan backward from that destination, tailored to the student's profile.
- **Skills Portfolio as the new transcript:** Build a portable, lifelong skills record for every student that demonstrates what they know and can do, organized by capability rather than course, and accessible across institutions, employers, and career stages.
- **Eliminate programs that do not lead to credentials of value:** Audit all degree programs against graduate employment and earnings outcomes; discontinue or redesign programs that have not produced career-ready graduates with living wages.
- **Employer co-design of skill standards:** Partner with regional employers to define the skills, competencies, and emotional intelligence attributes their hiring decisions actually rely on, then build curriculum backward from those definitions.
- **Shared accountability for student success plans:** Establish formal frameworks where students, faculty, advisors, and administrators all co-own the individualized success plan, with progress tracked, made visible to everyone, and actively managed.



What if there is no "program," no "pathway," only an unfolding, intelligent life design engine that plays like a VR game?

What if students own and carry their data across institutions like a digital passport?

What if students paid at the end only when they succeed? How would support systems change overnight?

What if the real problem is not fragmentation, but that we designed the wrong system in the first place?

If you were building a college today from scratch with AI-native infrastructure, what would you build?

COMPETENCY REVOLUTION

From seat time and grades to proven, portable skills.

BIG IDEA

Hire Ed: Employer-Driven Education as the New Institutional Architecture.

TRANSCRIPT	
ENG 101	C
MATH 110	B
HIST 205	C
BIO 100	D
PSY 150	B



SKILLS PORTFOLIO

- ✓ Data Analysis
- ✓ Communication
- ✓ Project Management
- ✓ Patient Care
- ✓ Welding Cert.

The group converged on a model called 'Hire Ed': an employer-driven education architecture that begins with regional labor market intelligence, defines required skills and competencies, builds stackable credentials and modular pathways around those skills, and measures institutional success by employment placement and wage outcomes. Funding, in this model, follows workforce outcomes rather than enrollment headcount. Employers become co-designers of curriculum, not just advisory board members. And the institution's primary performance metric is no longer completion rate it is economic mobility. This is not a tweak to the existing model. It is a redesign of the institution's value proposition from the ground up.

THE RISK	THE MITIGATION
CBE requires governance, faculty, and accreditor buy-in, which takes time.	Start with 2-3 high-demand workforce programs; prove it before scaling
Cutting even underperforming programs draws political resistance from faculty and community	Publish program-level employment and earnings data; let it drive the decision
Skills portfolios lack universal employer recognition, and standards vary widely	Set local skill standards with regional employers; align to NACE where available
Career-first design demands labor market intelligence most institutions lack	Track regional labor data; give IR or planning a workforce-intelligence role
Shared accountability requires cultural change technology alone cannot drive	Co-design accountability with faculty and students; pilot one division before full rollout

FIRST MOVE: DO THIS IN THE NEXT 30 DAYS

Pull your program-level completion and employment data for the last five years. Rank every degree and certificate program by two metrics: graduation rate and 90-day employment rate in the field. Identify the three programs at the bottom of both lists. Do not eliminate them yet – instead, convene the conversation with department chairs and employer partners about what redesign would look like. The data should lead; the conversation should follow.

THEME 3 · THE AI CONCIERGE:

Personalized, Proactive, and Always On

Delivering Information, Connections, and Help Before Students Even Ask

The most technologically specific theme of the Think Tank centered on what participants called the AI Personal Concierge: a 24/7, multilingual, proactive AI support system that knows each student's complete map; including academic requirements, financial obligations, personal circumstances, upcoming deadlines, and community resources and uses that knowledge to anticipate needs rather than simply respond to them.

The inspiration was a familiar service analogy: a high-end hotel concierge who does not wait for a guest to ask for help but proactively offers relevant information, connections, and solutions based on an understanding of the guest's needs and preferences. Applied to community college students, many of whom are managing work, family, financial stress, and academic complexity simultaneously, this kind of proactive, personalized support could be the difference between persistence and withdrawal.

The community dimension of the Concierge was equally compelling. Participants envisioned a system that does not just support the student while enrolled, but builds a lifelong connection between the individual and the institution. Alumni remain connected. Their children are engaged early. Community members are linked to college resources. The AI does not just serve the current student population; it builds the institution's community for a generation.

One participant captured the room: staff cannot be available at 3 a.m. when a student is trying to figure out how to pay their bill, find a food bank, or understand what will happen if they miss a registration deadline. The AI Concierge can be there 24/7, and the data it collects will include; when students are reaching out, what they are asking, and where they are getting stuck, all this information becomes a powerful input for institutional improvement.



Key Ideas Emerged

- **24/7 multilingual AI Personal Concierge:** Deploy an always-on AI assistant that supports students in any language, at any hour, for any need including academic planning, financial aid questions, resource navigation, deadline reminders, and crisis escalation.
- **Proactive support, anticipate before the student asks:** Build AI that monitors student engagement signals and proactively reaches out with timely reminders, personalized recommendations, and resource connections before problems become crises.
- **Community Connection platform, beyond graduation:** Extend the AI concierge's reach to connect students with peers, alumni, mentors, and community partners based on shared interests, building a lifelong institutional community rather than a transactional enrollment relationship.
- **Early engagement, as young as fourth grade:** Connect families and future students to the college well before high school through AI-guided resources, college-going culture, and community events.
- **Overnight and off-hours data as institutional intelligence:** Treat the AI concierge's off-hours queries as a real-time signal of the needs, stress points, and resource gaps daytime staff never see, then use those patterns to put support where and when students actually struggle.
- **Human escalation as the safety net:** Design the AI concierge with clear, low-friction pathways to human advisors, counselors, and emergency resources; the AI handles routine and informational needs so humans can focus on complex, high-stakes interactions.





How might we give every student a personal "support concierge," guiding them from entry to completion?

What if every student had 24/7 access to intelligent advising, coaching, and navigation?

What if support services come to the student before they even recognize a need?

What if AI could act as a "case manager," coordinating across all services on behalf of the student?

What if AI knows a student better than any advisor ever could, and uses that insight to empower humans, not replace them?

THE AI CONCIERGE

Proactive, multilingual support, before a student has to ask.



💡 BIG IDEA

The AI Personal Concierge: Every Student Has a Guide, Every Hour of the Day.

The most resonant idea from this theme was deceptively simple: every student, regardless of background or circumstance, should have access to the same quality of personalized guidance that affluent students get from well-networked families and private college counselors. The AI Concierge is the institutional commitment to equity at scale. It serves as a guide that knows the student's full map, anticipates their needs, connects them to their community, and stays with them from enrollment through career. This is not a replacement for human advisors, but the infrastructure that makes every human interaction more informed, more timely, and more effective.

THE RISK	THE MITIGATION
AI concierge deployed without equity design may replicate existing gaps in access and quality	Multilingual and accessible from day one; test with first-gen and low-income students before launch
Students may distrust AI systems, particularly around sensitive financial or personal information	Be transparent about how the AI works and what data it uses; give students data control and a human-only option
Off-hours AI data collection raises student privacy concerns if not clearly communicated	Publish a plain-language data policy; make collection visible and consent-based
Community connection features may feel intrusive if not designed with student agency at the center	Make community features opt-in and interest-driven; the concierge suggests, the student decides
K-12 engagement programs require partnerships with school districts that take time to build	Start with one feeder district and grade level; prove impact before scaling

FIRST MOVE: DO THIS IN THE NEXT 30 DAYS

Interview five students who withdrew from your institution in the last 12 months. Ask them one question: 'Was there a moment when you needed help and couldn't get it or didn't know where to go?' Their answers will define the first use case for your AI concierge. Design for that moment. That is where 24/7 support pays off first.

Next Steps: From Ideas to Action

The Seattle Think Tank generated bold, interconnected ideas across three themes. These themes are not independent, they compound each other. A unified platform without a competency-based curriculum still delivers fragmented credentials. A CBE model without an AI concierge still leaves students without the proactive support they need to persist. An AI concierge without a unified data architecture cannot see the whole student. The most powerful outcome is the combination: one system, one credential architecture, one always-on guide.

Participants identified the following priority actions to carry momentum from ideas to institutional change:

1. Conduct a System Fragmentation Audit

- a. Count every platform currently managing student interactions. Measure integration. Calculate the hidden cost of fragmentation in advisor time, missed outreach, and data inconsistency. Present the fragmentation score to your board within 60 days.

2. Review Program-Level Outcomes Data

- a. Pull completion rates and 90-day employment outcomes for every degree and certificate program. Identify the programs that are not delivering credentials of value. Begin the redesign or retirement conversation with transparent data leading the way.

3. Launch a CBE Pilot in one Workforce Program

- a. Select a high-demand program with strong employer partners. Design one competency-based pathway, partner with two or three employers to validate the skill standards, and measure completion and employment outcomes against the traditional track.

4. Design your Student Service Hub

- a. Map the three most common student journeys that currently require multiple department contacts. Redesign each as a single-contact experience. Define the data access, staffing model, and technology integration required. Pilot with your highest-volume student service function.

5. Interview Withdrawing Students

- a. Conduct exit interviews with five students who withdrew in the past semester. Ask specifically about moments when they needed help and could not access it. Their answers define the first use case for your AI concierge deployment.

6. Schedule a Futures Literacy Cabinet Session

- a. Schedule a Futures Literacy Cabinet Session. 90 minutes. No presentations. One question: In 24 months, what will a unified AI-enabled student support platform do to advising, financial aid, and enrollment at our institution? Build the habit of asking before disruption arrives.

"The student experience is not a service function. It is the institution's strategy. When students succeed, institutions succeed. When they fall through the cracks, everyone loses."

Participating CEOs

Dr. Chemene Crawford

Everett Community College

Dr. James Genandt

Manhattan Area Technical College

Dr. Sedgwick Harris

Bristol Community College

Ms. Lori Kloos

St. Cloud Technical and Community College

Dr. Brandon Kosine

Casper College

Dr. Jermain Pipkins

Dallas College

Dr. Rachel Solemsaas

North Seattle College

Dr. Wendi Tostenson

Volunteer State Community College

Think Tank Teams

Think Tank Leader**Dr. Ding-Jo Currie**

Director, Community College Think Tank & Strategic Solutions; Director, Leadership Institute for Tomorrow, CSUF

ConexED**Travis Prince**

CEO

Kelly Sinacola

Vice President of Solutions Engineering & Integrations

Think Tank Leadership Team**Dr. Pam Walker**

Co-Facilitator, CC Think Tank

Dr. Chi-Chung Keung

Think Tank Team

Brendan Henkel

Assistant Vice President of Solutions Engineering

FROM THREE SHIFTS TO ONE INSTITUTION

Every shift points to the same place: the student at the center.



ONE SYSTEM

One record, one door, one journey.



PROVEN SKILLS

Credentials employers actually recognize.



ALWAYS-ON GUIDANCE

Support that reaches students first.

Thank You

To sponsor or participate in future CEO Think Tanks, please contact Dr. Ding-Jo Currie at dingjo@ccthinktank.org

We want to thank and recognize these organizations for their support, partnership, and belief in professional development for community college leaders.

ConexED



References

1. ConexED. (2026, April 13). One system, or 17??? Solving the fragmentation and data crisis in student support [Conference presentation]. AACC Annual Conference, Seattle, WA.
2. ConexED National AI Analysis. (2026). State and system board nationwide conversation: AI analysis of 31 college systems across 26 states. Internal research report.
3. Gartner. (2024). Data & analytics research: The cost of poor data quality. Gartner Research.
4. Gonzalez, S. R. (2026). Economic impact of higher education enrollment [Chancellor's address]. Maricopa Community Colleges.
5. National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2025). Career readiness competencies for new college graduates. NACE. <https://www.naceweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/>
6. National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2024). Transfer and credit loss data. <https://nscresearchcenter.org/>
7. Okta. (2025). Businesses at work 2025. <https://www.okta.com/businesses-at-work/>
8. World Economic Forum. (2025). Future of jobs report 2025. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/>