Southern State Community College Strategic Plan

2026-2030

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- Southern State Community College has **a rich, fifty-year history of expanding opportunity** across southern Ohio. Each year, the college serves about 2,000 learners across five counties and supports more than 300 graduates entering the workforce or continuing their education.
- SSCC's mission centers on **providing accessible, affordable, high-quality education,** and its vision commits the college to being an **indispensable partner in advancing student success and strengthening regional economic growth.**
- This plan comes at a decisive moment for both the region and the college:
  - **Economic challenges persist** across SSCC's service area and **postsecondary attainment lags** the state.
  - Projected job growth suggests **more than half of new roles will require education beyond high school** but short of a bachelor's degree.
  - At the same time, demographic shifts, changing learner preferences, evolving workforce needs, and a crowded postsecondary ecosystem are **reshaping demand.**
  - Regional recruitment pipelines are tightening, adult enrollment has declined, employer needs are changing quickly, and online competitors are expanding their reach.
- Despite this complexity, **SSCC enters this period from a position of strength**. The college is trusted throughout the region, has demonstrated disciplined financial management, and delivers strong programs that employers value. Stakeholders described Southern State as an anchor for local talent development and a partner they want to see thrive. These assets provide a strong foundation for growth.
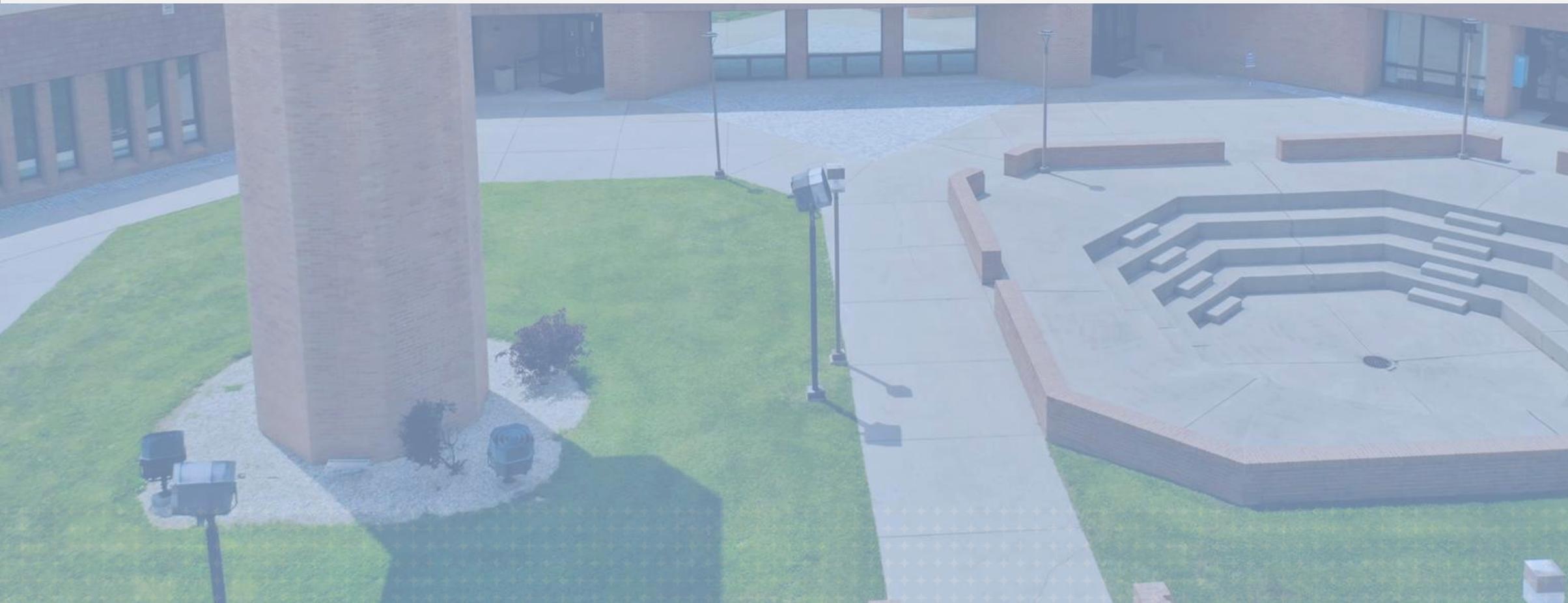
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Executive Summary (2 of 2)

- Over the next 3.5 years, SSCC will focus on **six strategic priorities** to meet the region's needs, strengthen student outcomes, and support long-term sustainability:

  1 **Build a future-ready portfolio of programs**

  2 **Shape a sustainable dual enrollment strategy**

  3 **Attract and engage more students**

  4 **Enhance student success and outcomes**

  5 **Modernize operations and data systems**

  6 **Strengthen people, systems, and culture**

- The plan also includes **contingency strategies to help SSCC respond to risks** such as consolidation pressures, dual enrollment funding changes, new federal and state rules, labor-market volatility, and enrollment fluctuations.

- To execute this strategy, **SSCC will invest $1.75M over three years**, including $1.5M in new operational costs focused on programs and student supports. These investments are feasible due to disciplined fiscal management.

- **Organizational shifts will further support execution**, including creation of a new Vice President of Enrollment & Workforce Innovation, consolidation of enrollment operations, integration of workforce development with enrollment strategy, expanded capacity in recruitment and outcomes, and a refocused Academic & Student Affairs division.

- Taken together, this plan positions Southern State to meet the needs of its communities, strengthen pathways into good jobs, improve outcomes for learners of all ages, and secure long-term institutional stability.
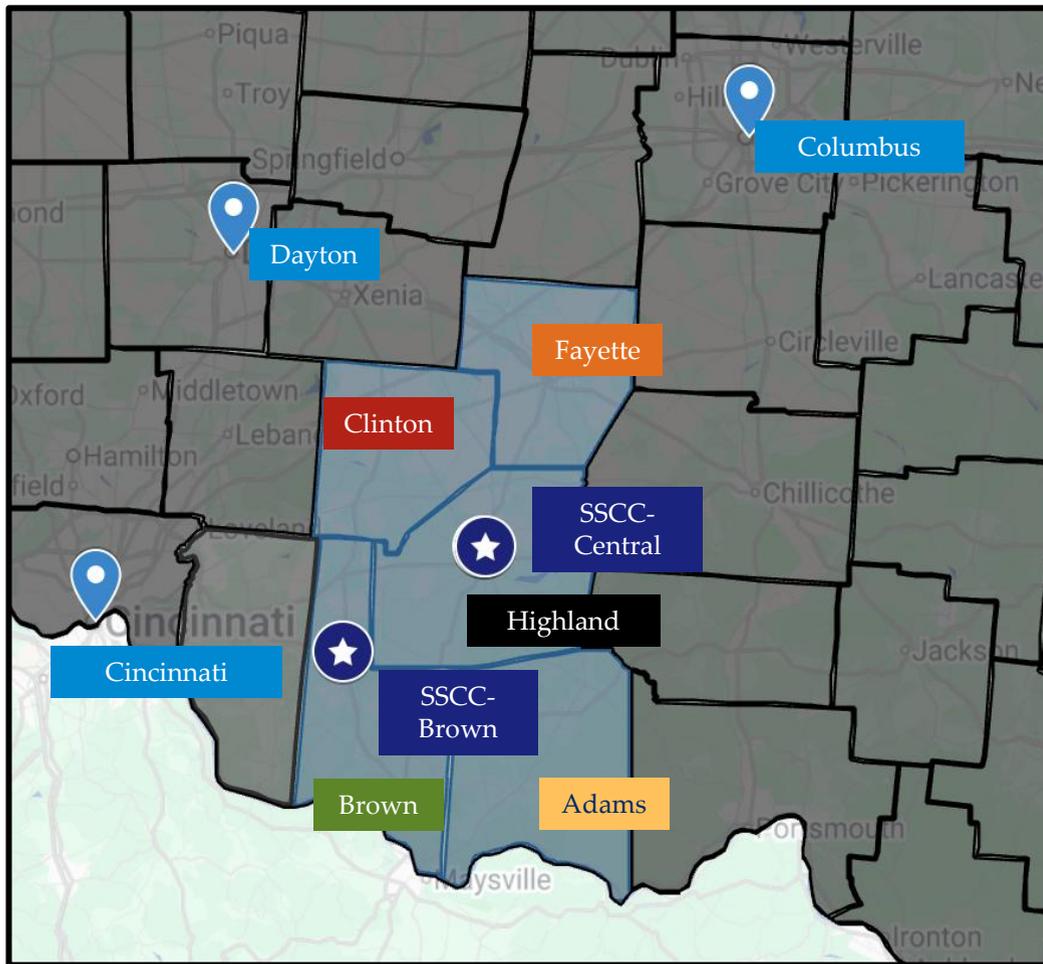
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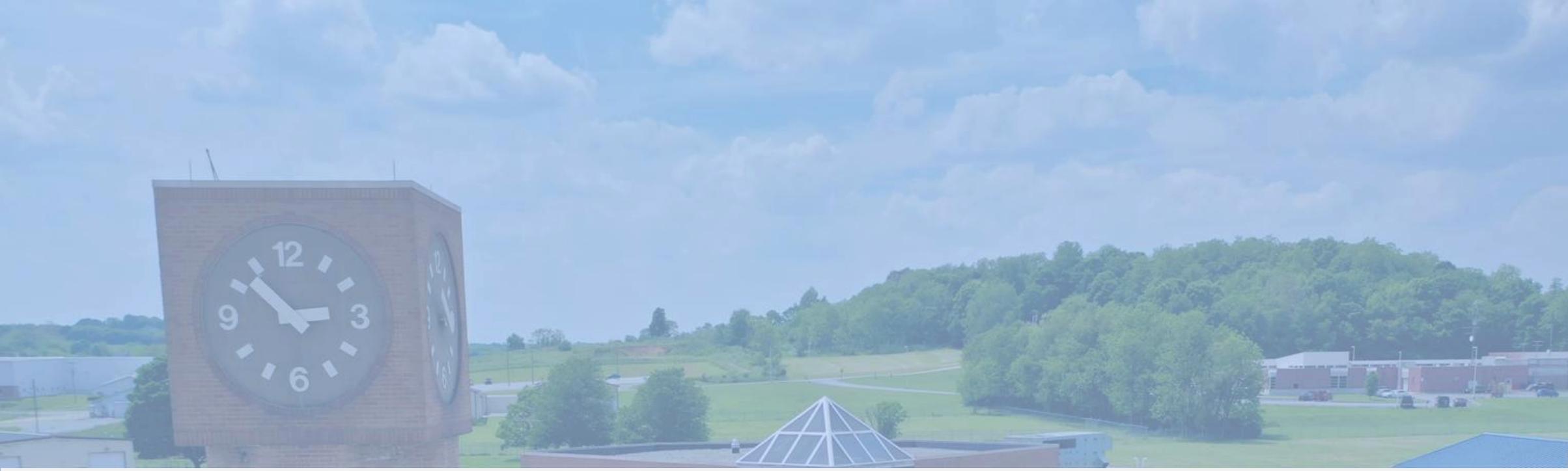
Background

Who We Are

For more than fifty years, Southern State has been a cornerstone of opportunity for southern Ohio

Southern State's Service Region

Major Metro — Campus — Service County

50 Years of Impact

2K — **Students served annually** across the five counties

300+ — **Graduates** entering the workforce or continuing their education each year

20K — Total **College Credit Plus** earned by high schoolers per year

18 — **Degree and certificate programs** aligned with local demand

Note: These specific figures are from SSCC internal data for SY23-24 and reflect typical annual results in recent years.

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Looking ahead, SSCC will remain guided by its mission and vision

The Mission

Southern State is committed to its mission to provide **accessible, affordable, and high-quality education** to people in southern Ohio.

The Vision

Southern State will be an **indispensable partner** in **advancing student success** and strengthening the **region's economic growth.**

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The region's evolving economic and educational needs make clear that SSCC's work is critical

Relevant Regional Economic and Educational Trends

Economic challenges persist in the region.	Unemployment and poverty rates in the region exceed the state average, and average household incomes remain $6K lower than Ohio's overall.
Educational attainment lags the state.	Fewer adults in SSCC's service area hold postsecondary credentials (~30%) compared to the state average (45%).
Education pays off for residents.	In Southern Ohio, an associate degree adds about $7,500 in annual earnings, while a bachelor's adds more than $17,000.
Training will be essential for future opportunities.	More than half of projected new jobs in Ohio by 2030 (about 54%) will require education beyond high school but less than a bachelor's degree.

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At the same time, national and regional shifts are reshaping what students, employers, and communities need from Southern State

Demographic Realities

- **Shrinking pipeline of traditional learners:** The number of high-school graduates in southern Ohio is declining, reducing SSCC's traditional enrollment base.
- **Shifting learner preferences:** Fewer students are interested in pursuing traditional degree pathways, with growing interest in short-term, stackable, and career-aligned credentials.

Labor Market Dynamics

- **Evolving workforce needs:** Major investments are reshaping regional industries, but demand remains fragmented and volatile as technological innovation accelerates change.
- **Small, service-oriented economy:** Many small employers and limited large-scale job growth exist, creating challenges for achieving scale in training and placement.

Collaboration and Competition Landscape

- **Blurring boundaries in a crowded ecosystem:** Nearly 200 Ohio institutions compete and collaborate for the same students and funding.
- **Rising consolidation pressures:** Financial strain and enrollment declines are driving mergers and shared-service models that could reshape the state's landscape.
- **Rise of online learning:** Regional and virtual providers recruit across counties and use online delivery to reach learners beyond traditional boundaries.

Policy and Funding Environment

- **Evolving state and federal priorities:** New and emerging funding models emphasize short-term, career-aligned programs that demonstrate clear outcomes.
- **Intensifying accountability focus:** State and federal agencies are sharpening expectations around measurable results.

Implications of these Shifts for SSCC

- **Grow programs aligned with employer needs and adult learners** and set up a steady process to refresh the portfolio.
- **Consider go forward mix of online and in person** offerings to meet learner needs and perferences
- **Upgrade data systems** to meet rising reporting and funding requirements.
- **Use strong position to drive regional partnerships**, while staying alert to consolidation pressures.

Source: Bellwether Phase 1 Factbase

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Amid change, SSCC's local roots and trusted relationships uniquely position it to advance opportunity across southern Ohio

Key Institutional Strengths to Leverage

Local roots, deep trust	For more than 50 years, SSCC has been a cornerstone of the region.	*"You'll see multiple generations come through SSCC. They understand this region and are committed to it."*
Disciplined management	Steady, disciplined decisions have put SSCC on solid financial footing	*"The college has made tough decisions, and now it's ready to imagine what's next from a position of strength."*
Proven excellence	Programs like nursing prove an ability to deliver aligned with local workforce needs	*"The nursing program is incredible. Employers are fighting to hire their graduates."*
Community support	People across the region want SSCC to thrive	*"The community is invested in Southern State's success and wants to see them win."*

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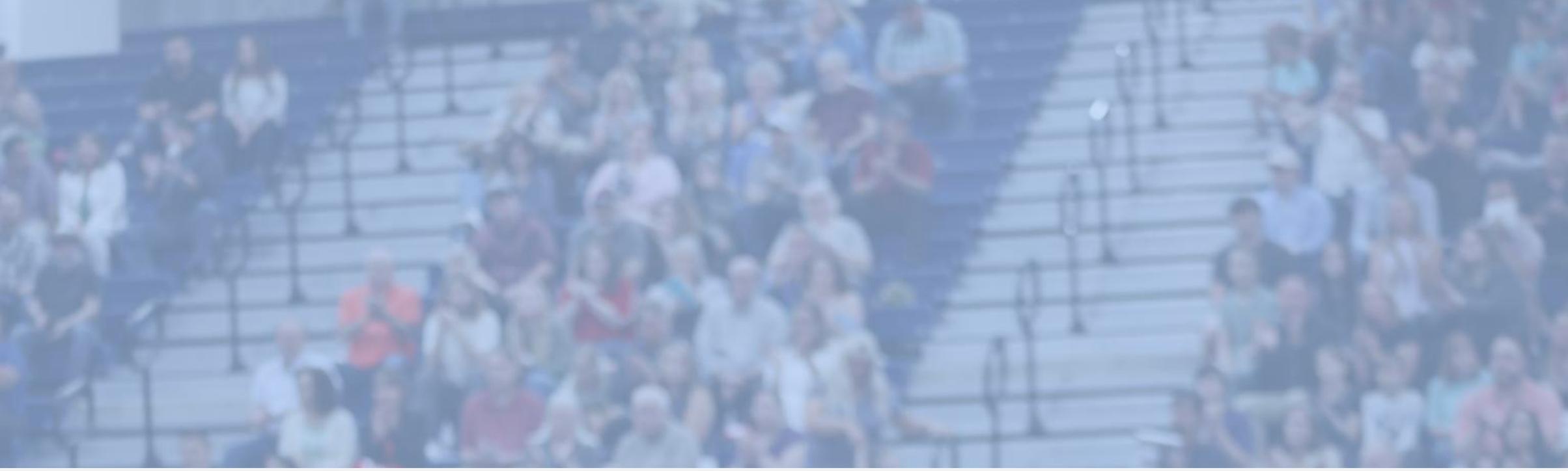
The Strategy

Where We're Going

To navigate this moment, SSCC will evolve through six strategic priorities

Southern State Community College, Strategic Priorities (2026-2029)

PROGRAMS	1	**Build a future-ready portfolio of programs** linked to workforce needs and raise the quality of delivery, including online offerings
	2	**Shape a sustainable dual enrollment strategy** that delivers strong outcomes and stays aligned with SSCC's broader priorities
STUDENTS	3	**Attract and engage more students** by rebuilding pipelines through clear messaging, modern outreach, and community partnership
	4	**Enhance student success and outcomes** by creating connected, student-centered supports that improve persistence and completion
ORGANIZATION	5	**Modernize operations and data systems** to streamline processes, strengthen data use, and deliver faster, higher-quality service
	6	**Strengthen people, systems, and culture** to align structure, talent, and growth with SSCC's mission and future goals

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1. __Build a future-ready portfolio of programs__

Goal	Refine and expand SSCC's portfolio of programs to meet evolving workforce needs, open new pathways for learners, and strengthen the college's role as a driver of regional opportunity
Rationale	This priority is critical to ensuring SSCC remains a responsive, high-impact college. It will: • **Align what SSCC offers to where opportunity is growing:** As economic forces and student preferences shift, SSCC must strengthen the feedback loop between employer demand, student interest, and program offerings. • **Move from retrenchment to growth:** SSCC has been disciplined in reducing underperforming programs. The next step is to proactively identify where to invest and innovate, guided by data. • **Meet workforce and learner needs together:** Employers want graduates who are job-ready, and students need programs that fit their lives. Expanding work-based learning, modular formats, and flexible delivery models will connect more learners to in-demand careers. • **Position SSCC for sustainable funding:** As state and federal formulas increasingly reward employment outcomes, a more demand-aligned program mix will strengthen both mission and financial health.
Draft Initiatives	A. **Expand SSCC's existing Program Vitality Review foundation to include a New Program Assessment Process** with clear criteria and routines for identifying new opportunities for growth (see Appendix for a draft set of criteria). B. **Establish a consistent program design process** to guide new offerings and periodically assess the format, timing, and learner fit of existing ones across different student segments. C. **Use updated processes to identify, design and launch 2–4 new programs or credentials** in high-demand, high-wage fields, likely emphasizing short-term, stackable, and transfer-friendly options to appeal to adult learners. D. **Deepen employer integration** in new and existing programs through formal advisory input, expanded work-based learning (apprenticeships, co-ops, etc), and employer validation of program outcomes. E. **Conduct regular program marketing audits** to ensure descriptions and outreach reflect program strengths and align with learner demand, especially with segments that are not enrolling at target levels. F. **Right-size and resource online education** to ensure consistent quality, capacity, and attention to emerging learner and employer needs.

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2. **Shape a sustainable dual enrollment strategy**

Definition of Success	Define and deliver a best-in-class College Credit Plus (CCP) experience that balances access, quality, and long-term impact, ensuring dual enrollment serves as a true pathway to college and career success.
Rationale	This priority is critical to sustaining SSCC's enrollment strength while deepening its educational impact. It will: • **Clarify SSCC's long-term CCP strategy:** With CCP now representing nearly 60 percent of total enrollment, SSCC must continue to maintain a strong program while seeking to balance CCP participation with serving traditional students • **Ensure SSCC's stability in a changing policy environment:** With dual enrollment central to both state priorities and SSCC's financial health, the college must anticipate (and where possible influence) legislative and funding shifts to protect its core mission. • **Better bridge dual enrollment to college and career success:** SSCC has a mission-aligned opportunity to help CCP students transition into SSCC credential or degree programs that lead to good jobs.
Draft Initiatives	A. **Develop a clear, long-term strategy for CCP** that defines goals for growth, mix, and desired outcomes across partner schools and delivery models. B. **Enhance transition supports for CCP learners** to improve conversion into SSCC credential and degree programs through proactive advising, communication, and follow-up. C. **Monitor and where possible proactively engage on state policy and funding developments** related to dual enrollment to anticipate legislative changes and adjust strategy as needed. D. **Regularly review the CCP program** to ensure alignment with SSCC's mission, workforce priorities, and institutional capacity.

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3. Attract and engage more students

Definition of Success	Rebuild SSCC's enrollment pipeline by telling a clearer, more compelling story about the college's value and by modernizing outreach systems to connect with learners across Southern Ohio.
Rationale	This priority is critical to stabilizing and growing SSCC's student body. It will: • **Rebalance SSCC's enrollment mix:** With CCP accounting for the majority of enrollment and adult participation declining nearly 40 percent since 2018, SSCC must increase recruitment of graduating high schoolers and working adults who are first-time college-going, with some college but no degree, and/or seeking to up-skill. • **Strengthen SSCC's visibility and reach:** Campus closures and limited marketing capacity have reduced the college's local presence. Rebuilding brand awareness and deepening community partnerships will expand reach across its five-county service area. • **Modernize marketing and recruitment systems:** Fragmented tools and manual processes limit SSCC's ability to target, track, and personalize engagement. Streamlined systems will make recruitment more efficient and responsive. • **Differentiate SSCC's value in a crowded market:** Clear, data-informed messaging that highlights affordability, quality, and outcomes will help SSCC stand out among regional peers and online competitors.
Draft Initiatives	A. **Develop an enrollment strategy** with clear goals for scale and mix, supported by communication, recruitment, and enrollment plans tailored to each student segment (including defining those segments) B. **Modernize marketing and stand up a CRM system** to enable targeted outreach, real-time tracking, and personalized follow-up from first contact through enrollment. C. **Refresh SSCC's brand and messaging** to highlight its affordability, quality programs, return on investment, and strong employment outcomes. D. **Implement proactive outreach campaigns for adult learners**, using data to identify and re-engage prospective students.

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4. <u>Enhance student success and outcomes</u>

Definition of Success	Create a connected, student-centered experience that helps every SSCC learner feel supported, valued, and equipped to persist through completion, whether learning on campus, online, or in the community.
Rationale	This priority is critical to improving retention, completion, and overall student satisfaction. It will: • **Streamline the student experience:** Students and staff describe SSCC's current processes as siloed. Building a coordinated approach will help students access the right support at the right time. • **Foster belonging and connection:** Declines in on-campus activity and limited visibility across the region have reduced students' sense of community. Creating spaces—physical and virtual—where students feel seen and supported will strengthen engagement and persistence. • **Elevate outcomes and accountability:** SSCC's retention and completion rates lag state peers. Integrating early alerts, proactive advising, and data-informed interventions will help close gaps and improve results.
Draft Initiatives	A. **Refine structures for gathering ongoing student feedback** to shape the design and continuous improvement of student programs and supports. B. **Redesign advising, orientation, and student supports into a coordinated "one-stop" model** that connects academic, financial, employment and personal services. C. **Optimize and ensure universal adoption of an early alert software** to help faculty and staff identify and support at-risk students. D. **Reimagine campus and community spaces** as hubs for connection and access to services across all five counties to ensure strong student outcomes E. **Expand digital and hybrid student supports such as virtual advising, chat, and self-service tools** to match the realities of online and part-time learners. F. **Align staffing and professional development** to ensure advising and student-facing teams have the capacity and training to deliver a consistent, high-quality experience.

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5. <u>Modernize operations and data systems</u>

Definition of Success	Transform SSCC's operational systems and processes to be simple, connected, and data-driven—enabling students to navigate college with ease and staff to make timely, informed decisions.
Rationale	This priority is critical to improving the student experience and the college's institutional effectiveness. It will: • **Enhance data-driven decision making:** Integrated, accurate data will strengthen compliance, decision-making, continuous improvement and transparency across the college. • **Enable access to new funding:** Stronger data and reporting capacity will position SSCC to meet emerging state and federal requirements that tie dollars to measurable outcomes. • **Improve responsiveness and service quality:** By automating routine tasks and digitizing workflows, SSCC can deliver faster, more reliable service to students and employees.
Draft Initiatives	A. **Review and simplify key student processes,** from admissions and registration to financial aid, transcript evaluation, prerequisite checks, and non-payment actions, so students move through the system with ease B. **Integrate and modernize data systems** across functions to ensure accurate, timely, and accessible information on student progress and outcomes. C. **Develop real-time dashboards** for enrollment, retention, and compliance to support data-informed management. D. **Digitize paper-based workflows and automate repetitive tasks** to improve efficiency and reduce error. E. **Build staff capacity in data literacy and change management** to sustain improvements and foster a culture of evidence-based decision-making.

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Strengthen people, systems, and culture

Definition of Success	Align SSCC's structure, roles, and professional development with the college's strategic direction while fostering a culture of collaboration, accountability, and growth
Rationale	This priority is critical to delivering on every other strategic priority. It will: • **Align people and structure with strategy:** After years of retirements and role consolidation, SSCC must ensure staffing levels, skills, and structures reflect the college's future direction and priorities. • **Strengthen recruitment and retention:** Competitive pressures, especially in nursing and technical fields, make it essential to attract and keep top talent through flexible staffing models and targeted incentives. • **Foster a culture of accountability and growth:** Clear expectations, regular feedback, and professional learning will empower employees to perform at their best and advance SSCC's mission
Draft Initiatives	A. **Redesign the organizational structure** to better align talent, roles, and capacity with strategic priorities. B. **Design a talent strategy that addresses recruitment, retention, and succession in hard-to-staff areas**, with thoughtful attention to union-related constraints. C. **Clarify performance expectations and feedback systems** to strengthen accountability and continuous improvement. D. **Design and launch a professional learning framework** that builds core skills in leadership, collaboration, tech skills, AI literacy, and student success. E. **Enhance internal communication and recognition systems** to reinforce a shared culture of excellence and belonging. F. **Monitor engagement and retention metrics** to assess progress and guide ongoing investment in SSCC's workforce.

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