

## POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

# College Student Basic Needs Services Evaluation

**Partner** Mt. Hood Community College

**Team** Rachel Maller, Leanne Davis, Pablo López Trujillo



## Strengthening basic needs services

Colleges and universities recognize that students' ability to succeed in higher education is closely connected to whether their basic needs are met. At Mt. Hood Community College (MHCC), student basic needs became an increasing concern following the COVID-19 pandemic, as more students relied on support services to stay enrolled. While MHCC expanded its services to meet immediate needs, its leaders needed a better understanding of service gaps, as they attempted to build a more sustainable, proactive system of support.

Using funding from the U.S. Department of Education's IREPO program, MHCC partnered with Education Northwest to evaluate and strengthen its basic needs efforts. The evaluation aimed to identify current strengths, gaps, and student needs to inform future planning and strengthen institutional capacity.

## Co-designing the work

Education Northwest worked closely with MHCC to design an evaluation approach grounded in the college's local context, priorities, and existing work. The team reviewed institutional documents, prior assessments, strategic plans, and existing basic needs efforts to better understand the college's goals, services, and student population. Throughout the project, Education Northwest met regularly with college partners to co-design research activities, refine data collection approaches, interpret findings together, and align the work with MHCC's long-term vision for student support and institutional sustainability.

Education Northwest ultimately conducted a comprehensive mixed-methods evaluation to assess student basic needs, service usage, and opportunities to strengthen MHCC's system of support. The evaluation included multiple data sources and perspectives to provide a holistic understanding of student and institutional experiences.

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## **Building capacity for continuous improvement**

The evaluation provided MHCC with actionable data and recommendations to strengthen and sustain its student basic needs efforts. Findings informed institutional planning around outreach, service coordination, and resource allocation, while also reinforcing student basic needs as a college-wide equity priority. The project also helped build internal capacity for ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement, equipping MHCC with tools and data collection processes to continue assessing student needs and measuring progress over time.

The college plans to use the results to improve outreach and awareness of services, identify priorities for resource investment, strengthen coordination across programs and community partnerships, and advocate for additional institutional and external support.