

PATRIOT PATHWAYS

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2026 |
EDITION 1.3

SACSCOC: VISIT AND ASSESSMENT

In October of 2025, our QEP co-leads, Sarah Kilgo and Michael Clough, presented Patriot Pathways to the SACSCOC On-Site Reaffirmation Committee, ICC's Board of Trustees, and representatives of ICC's faculty, staff, and administration.

The reception to Patriot Pathways was positive. The Reaffirmation Committee's assessment noted that ICC's QEP "not only demonstrates a clear commitment to the guided pathways model, but also underscores its dedication to serving students and the community."



WHAT'S NEXT?

Over the next five years, ICC faculty, staff, and students will develop, implement, and analyze Patriot Pathways. If you are reading this, you will probably contribute to its success. Keep reading to learn why we're implementing Patriot Pathways, what's been done, where it's going, and how you might play a part.

RE-CAP: WHY PATRIOT PATHWAYS?

Patriot Pathways starts with the end in mind. It provides students with the following:

- Programs aligned to broad academic and career fields to facilitate navigation.
- Expected career and transfer outcomes, including employability and wages.
- Clear academic maps to desired outcomes.
- Pervasive support throughout the journey.

At its core, Patriot Pathways is a vehicle for economic accessibility and development for all.

THE FOUR PILLARS

Patriot Pathways is built around four principles:

1. **Clarify the paths**
2. **Get students on a path**
3. **Keep them on the paths**
4. **Ensure they're learning**

With Patriot Pathways, students will have a firm goal, a clear plan, and the tools and support to make it happen.

Have a question or feedback to share with the QEP Steering Committee? Submit it here.



PATRIOT PATHWAYS AT A GLANCE

5 Deliverables

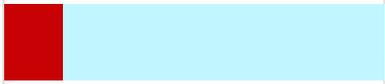
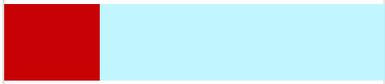
1. Career clusters
2. Curriculum maps
3. New Student Orientation (NSO) and Onboarding
4. Redesigned ACA-122
5. Contextualized gateway English and math

2 Primary Outcomes

1. Increase gateway math and English completion rates
2. Decrease program updates and changes

WHERE ARE WE NOW? WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Everywhere you look, people are hard at work implementing Patriot Pathways.

Deliverable	What's been done?	What's left to do?	Patriot Progress
Career Clusters	Clusters identified, organized, and branded	The hard part: updates to website, messaging, and processes. A cultural shift.	
Curriculum Maps	75% of current degrees and certifications are mapped in <i>doomshark</i> , an innovative tool developed in-house.	Complete program maps for 26-27 academic year in early spring 2026. Connect to individual student planning process.	
New Student Orientation & Onboarding	NSO Team has met twice and reviewed objectives, needs, and begun planning.	Summer 2026: New Student Orientation and onboarding process goes live.	
Redesigned ACA-122	ACA overhauled with focus on career outcomes. Healthcare and Wellness Cluster pilot developed.	Spring 2026: Pilot Healthcare and Wellness ACA-122. Spring 2027: Full rollout, all career clusters.	
Contextualized English and math	Have met with outside contextualization experts and developed initial concepts for curriculum design.	Spring 2026: English team will meet with career cluster instructors. Fall 2026: Pilot ENG-111 Spring 2027: Pilot MAT Fall 2027: ENG rollout. Spring 2028: MAT rollout	

Why Change?

We're already pretty great. What's the point?

Why Career Clusters and Program Maps?

Aligning programs with career clusters helps students explore related careers without getting lost in too many options. These clusters group similar fields, programs, and credentials together, so undecided students can start in a broad area of interest, build common skills, and then specialize later without losing time or credits. Career clusters also encourage sense of community and belonging through branding, communication, and common courses and events. Program maps, thematically aligned within clusters, illustrate the specific steps and timeline to achieve a credential. We are already familiar with student-oriented academic mapping, so it should come as no surprise that students that can visualize their goal and the steps that lead to it are more likely to succeed. Predefined program maps simply streamline the process.

Why Contextualize ACA, English, and math courses?

In guided pathways, students should engage in their field early and often to crystalize their goals (or recognize a poor fit) from the start. One recommendation is that students should take a core "light the fire" class in their first semester. Another way to increase engagement is to make foundational English and math directly relevant to students' programs of study. When reading, writing, and quantitative skills are taught using discipline-specific applications, students better identify the purpose of the coursework, engage more deeply, and persist at higher rates. Furthermore, contextualized ACA reaffirms student goals and increases opportunity for specialized, field-specific engagement. Contextualization maintains academic rigor while supporting equity, reducing excess credits, and helping students progress more efficiently toward completion.

Why redesign new student orientation?

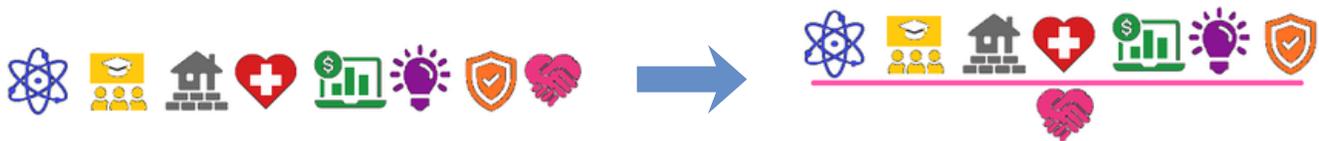
In Patriot Pathways, students begin with the end in mind. All orientations introduce students to resources and expectations, but a Patriot Pathways orientation also ensures students know why they are there and where they are going. Beginning with orientation, the new student experience integrates career exploration and helps students identify concrete academic and professional goals, understand career clusters and program pathways, develop an academic plan, and connect with advising and support services. By providing clear direction, reducing confusion, and setting expectations upfront, our redesigned orientation will help students make informed choices, gain early momentum, and stay on a clear path toward completion.



DISCUSSION AND DEVELOPMENTS

Patriot Pathways was well received by the ICC's Board of Trustees and the SACSCOC On-Site Reaffirmation Committee. However, that does not mean there were no questions or suggestions. In particular, we heard concerns regarding the thematic organization of the "Student Support" cluster, sufficient support for faculty and staffing, and the overall scope of our objectives.

Student Support: The Student Support cluster is designed to gather the resources, services, and personnel dedicated specifically to providing student service and support. The QEP text was clear on its purpose, but visual aids within the document grouped Student Support alongside career clusters, which caused confusion. In response, efforts will be made to visually separate Student Support from other clusters to make the distinction clear. One popular suggestion was to place Student Support underneath all the career clusters, representing its role in supporting all other clusters, as seen below:



Note: The above illustrates only one potential solution.

Faculty and Staff Support: The Reaffirmation Committee inquired about support for faculty and staff taking on additional responsibilities. In particular, they noted that the curriculum design required of course contextualization is an involved process (preaching to the choir!), and both professional development and supplementary compensation were mentioned. Contextualization professional development and further financial resources are in development. Efforts *have* been made to ease the burden, including an extended timeline of up to three years for full contextualized implementation. Additionally, some curriculum design was inevitable, with or without the QEP. For instance, ACA-122 is undergoing a state-wide redesign that largely aligns with Patriot Pathways objectives, so the goal is to integrate contextualization into that process as seamlessly as possible. That said, there is no question that our faculty and staff are dedicating tremendous effort to Patriot Pathways, and we will be looking for opportunities to show our appreciation over the coming months and years.

Outcomes: While Patriot Pathways deliverables and outcomes are focused and clearly defined, they are also ambitious. The Reaffirmation Committee was concerned about the third outcome: *Increase program completion rates, measured as full-time students at 100%, 150%, and 200% of expected time to completion.* With some elements of Patriot Pathways taking up to three years to implement, the committee noted that there might not be sufficient time for a complete data set. While this possibility was accounted for in the QEP, it was a valid critique. The committee also pointed out that program completion rate is a lagging indicator and may depend upon a multitude of variables, including some outside the scope of and control of ICC and Patriot Pathways (COVID-19 and Helene come to mind). This criticism is also valid. After much deliberation, the QEP Leadership Team elected to drop the third outcome from the QEP. We will continue to track those metrics as an encapsulation of ICC's mission. However, they will not be used as formal metrics within the QEP itself.

DISCUSSION AND DEVELOPMENTS

(CONTINUED)

BIG News from SACSCOC for the QEP

In September 2025, as Patriot Pathways was being prepared for submission, SACSCOC announced the **First 100 Day Plan**, a set of actions intended to make accreditation a more efficient, student-focused, and user-friendly process for member schools. While the plan includes many updates to SACSCOC’s organizational outlook, the most dramatic is a “study period” for Principles of Accreditation Standard 7.2: The QEP.

During the study period, SACSCOC will review Standard 7.2 to determine if the QEP remains relevant to the accreditation of today’s institutions. Following a period of research and evaluation, a vote on potential changes to the QEP (and the Principles of Accreditation as a whole) is scheduled for December 2026. It is possible that the QEP will no longer be a requirement for SACSCOC accreditation. It is possible that the requirements of the QEP will change significantly. It is also possible (though highly unlikely) that Standard 7.2 will remain exactly the way it is.

What does it mean for Patriot Pathways?

Due to the timing of the study period, ICC was not required to submit a QEP at all. The fact that we did so reflects our confidence in Patriot Pathways as an effective model to improve our college and community, as well as our desire for professional review and feedback. We cannot be certain how SACSCOC’s vision for the QEP may evolve over the next few years. Though we know ICC will be “held harmless” no matter what happens, we also know that successful implementation of our QEP is in the best interests of our students. Patriot Pathways represents nearly two years of planning and development. It is built upon rigorous research and extensive data, reflects best practices at the state and national level, and is intertwined with ICC’s strategic plan and mission. Patriot Pathways implementation is already underway, and there is no reason to stop until we’ve built a guided pathways model that we can be proud of - one that provides students with the structure and support to accomplish their academic and professional goals.

For more information about the current state of Principles of Accreditation Standard 7.2: the Quality Enhancement Plan, see the following:

- **100 Days FAQs** <https://sacscoc.org/100-days-faqs/>
- **Law or Lore: The Quality Enhancement Plan, Hold Harmless, and Institutional Trust.** <https://sacscoc.org/law-or-lore-2/>

