

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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McLennan Community College Prioritizes Student Belonging Through Caring Campus

LONG BEACH, CA – McLennan Community College in Waco, Texas is strengthening student belonging through Caring Campus, creating an environment where every student feels welcomed and empowered to succeed from the moment they step onto campus.

Through a dedication to the Caring Campus behavioral commitments, intentionality during the first week of school, and small but meaningful strategies which show students that employees care, McLennan is creating a culture where every student can thrive. Known at the college as McLennan Always Cares, this work reflects a campuswide commitment to fostering connection and belonging for every student.

“It always goes back to student belonging,” Dr. Mandy Morrison, McLennan Visual and Performing Arts Division Chair and Caring Campus liaison, said. “Our students come from a variety of backgrounds and have overcome many obstacles, and we want them to know they’re in the right place from day one.”

Staff created a robust first-week program for students, encouraging campuswide involvement. The college’s Greeter program ensures students are warmly welcomed to campus, able to find someone who can help by wearing bright vests and nametags, and connected to the resources they need to succeed. Student survey feedback revealed positive results from the first-week efforts, with many students saying they felt less intimidated and more confident on their first day after being welcomed and cheered on by greeters.

Staff also send reminders midway through the semester, ensuring employees remember that some students may be coming onto campus for the first time as part of a new term. Staff have also developed a Caught You Caring program to celebrate employees who demonstrate the behavioral commitments in their daily interactions with students. The college’s Human Resources department has also started integrating Caring Campus into onboarding, helping new employees understand their role in creating a welcoming and supportive environment.

These successes are driven by strong leadership from the McLennan Always Cares Staff Co-Chairs, Crystal Johnson and Kelli Nehring, who help guide the work and keep employees engaged in fostering a culture of care across campus.

“Caring Campus is really shaped by the people who are involved,” Morrison said. “It allows staff and faculty the freedom to run with it and make it their own, which has been incredibly empowering for everyone.”

Morrison, Johnson, and Nehring presented at the inaugural Caring Campus Conference in November 2025 on the early successes and challenges the college had experience while implementing Caring Campus.

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“We found the Caring Campus Conference tremendously helpful and affirming in our experience and made a lot of great connections,” Morrison said. “My hope moving forward is that Caring Campus becomes so ingrained into our culture that we don’t even have to think about the behavioral commitments because it’s just who we are.”

McLennan Community College chose to use institutional funds for Caring Campus, demonstrating a deep commitment to student belonging and success. The college’s president, vice presidents, and Board of Trustees strongly supported the decision, recognizing that strengthening student belonging is essential to improving student success.

Institutions interested in self-paying for Caring Campus can contact Chief Operating Officer Ken Sherwood at ksherwood@iebcnow.org for more information.

“McLennan Community College staff and faculty are fully committed to supporting their students,” Caring Campus founder and CEO Dr. Brad Phillips said. “By investing in Caring Campus and empowering employees to lead this work, they are creating a culture where students feel welcomed, supported, and confident from the very beginning.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

IEBC_MCLENNAN1: McLennan Community College is strengthening student belonging through Caring Campus, creating an environment where every student feels welcomed and empowered to succeed from the moment they step onto campus.

IEBC_MCLENNAN2: McLennan Community College staff welcomed students to campus during the first week by wearing bright vests and nametags to ensure they were easily identifiable.

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