



# Mt. Hood Community College

Image Study & Community Needs Assessment





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Many thanks to residents, business stakeholders, and parents who responded to our surveys, and a very special thank you to those participants who battled heavy rainstorms in rush-hour traffic to take part in our focus group discussions.

About the Human Services Research Institute: The Human Services Research Institute ([www.hsri.org](http://www.hsri.org)) is a nonprofit, mission-driven organization that works with government agencies and others to improve health and human services and systems, enhance the quality of data to guide policy, and engage stakeholders to effect meaningful systems change.

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# Executive Summary



## Introduction

The Mt. Hood Community College (MHCC) is a hub for educational, economic, and cultural opportunities, serving over 30,000 residents each year. With a district spanning from East Portland to beyond Mount Hood, the college serves a large and diverse community. It's increasingly important for community colleges, including MHCC, to understand the needs and perceptions of community residents, business stakeholders, and potential students in order to shape offerings, programming, and marketing. As the result of in-migration, growth, and a changing economy, the needs of in-district residents are evolving.

To integrate MHCC more deeply with the surrounding community, enhance its responsiveness to changing resident needs, and gauge public awareness of college offerings, the Office of Analytics & Institutional Research (AIR) contracted with the Human Services Research Institute (HSRI) to launch a community needs and perception study with the goal of providing current data and recommendations toward effective outreach strategies, service delivery gaps, and opportunities for new community partnerships. Ensuring that students and residents perceive and experience the benefits available through MHCC is key; this image study and needs assessment will not only allow the district to support an equipped and educated workforce, it will also situate the college to remain viable within the current economic climate.

## Methods

The Mt. Hood Community College Needs and Perception Project used three information and data collection methods. First, interviews with MHCC leadership defined the context, goals, and direction of the study. Next, personnel from HSRI and MHCC AIR collaborated to produce surveys for three key stakeholder groups: district residents, business stakeholders, and parents of high school students. Finally, narrative feedback from focus groups held across the five district zones added context and clarity to survey data.

Despite extensive dissemination efforts, survey response rates were quite low, so these findings and recommendations must be adopted with caution. Nevertheless, based on the triangulation of data between surveys and across focus groups, we believe these findings are likely to generalize to the broader population of the district.

## Key Findings

Participants in the survey and focus groups expressed their opinions about the school, and the feedback was broad and complex. The larger community has a range of thoughts and ideas associated with the school. It should be noted that while there was some variation in resident, business, and parent attitudes toward MHCC, with a few exceptions, individuals who described direct experience of being a student at MHCC or those who had worked at the college report positive experiences and affection for the college.

### College Purpose

District residents believe that it is important for MHCC to continue to provide a wide variety of educational programs for residents, while at the same time creating a clear identity for the school that differentiates it from other schools. Business leaders were especially concerned that currently the school lacks an identity. Some suggested creating a center for excellence as a way to achieve this and to differentiate themselves from other colleges.

Although some differences do exist depending on district zones, residents believe MHCC should focus efforts both on community enrichment and education and educational degrees, and that intensive community involvement is preferable to no involvement.

### Guidance and Support

Respondents believe that MHCC should be more than simply a center for learning for students. They feel that students are overwhelmed and unprepared to achieve their goals and are looking to the college to be a guide. Several forms of guidance were highlighted in surveys and focus groups and across populations. These included helping students explore and define goals, learn life skills, monitor that credits will transfer appropriately, and assist in finding job or academic enrichment opportunities while at the college.

## Communication

The strongest theme running through the report is that of communication. There is a concern about the degree to which information is shared, the methods used, and messaging. Several data sources indicate that too little information is reaching the public about the array of services that MHCC provides. For example, a notable number of parents are unaware of the various programs offered by MHCC that can benefit their children; many parents lack knowledge about the transfer options to, and dual enrollment with, 4-year universities; and while they say that MHCC provides high-quality career and vocational education, they are mixed in their knowledge of the specific programs that are offered.

## Community Visibility

A related theme is Mt. Hood's visibility in the community. In terms of offerings, several focus group participants noted that in order to be aware of events happening at MHCC information needs to be deliberately sought; more than a few described knowing of opportunities and excellent events at MHCC by chance, through word of mouth, rather than through publicity disseminated by the college despite being very involved as community members.

Others were concerned about a perceived lack of personal and regular participation by MHCC leaders and representatives within the traditional organizations important to local business and community leaders, contributing to a belief that the college is disconnected from the community. To underscore the point several business stakeholders stated they would be unable to personally identify current leaders or other college representatives.

Maintaining a higher profile in local schools may also be beneficial to MHCC. One high school administrator lamented that had MHCC been in the forefront of her mind she would have invited representatives to host a table at the recent parent/teacher conference. She felt this would have been of immense use to parents and students.

Limited exposure within the community affects MHCC in different ways. For example, business leaders become frustrated with a perceived lack of MHCC interest in and understanding of their organizational needs, and the work needs of the local community; high school administrators may forget MHCC as an invitee when organizing school events. Finally, data also indicates that many district residents cannot see a MHCC impact on their life individually this impacting their engagement with, and willingness to support the school financially.

## Community Familiarity with MHCC Campuses

Business stakeholders tend to visit the Gresham campus fairly frequently, but residents and high school parents are less frequent visitors; for example, 41% of parents surveyed had not visited the Gresham campus even once over the previous year, and over 50% of residents had visited the campus once only or not at all. Perhaps less surprisingly, given the specialist foci of the other MHCC centers, 95% of residents, 90% of parents, and 90% of business stakeholders stated no visits to the

Bruning Center over the past year, and 89% of district residents, 90% of business stakeholders, and 82% of parents stated no visits to the Maywood Park Center in the prior year.

Once again, fewer visits to the campus likely comes less understanding of what the school can offer and the benefits those offerings could provide.

#### Selecting a School for Further Education

District residents and business stakeholders tend to choose MHCC as their first recommendation for further education, whereas parents tend to choose a 4-year school. To some extent the choice of MHCC versus an alternate school was based on proximity to MHCC versus a closer option. But other factors impacting the likelihood of choosing MHCC as a first choice included whether a specific program was available at the school and cost of attendance. While MHCC was seen as a relatively low-cost option to extend education, a considerable number of participants noted a reason for not choosing MHCC would be lack of scholarships or financial aid. Perceived stigma of attending a local community college was also offered by a few respondents as a potential reason for not attending MHCC.

#### Community and Business Stakeholder Engagement

Farmers markets are particularly well-attended activities at MHCC. District residents, particularly those living close to the college, take advantage of the special events and activities that occur at the school, and many say that if these were increased and expanded, they would be even more likely to attend different events. Similarly, if skills workshops were expanded, residents say they would want to attend these.

Career planning and customized training appear to be two well-used MHCC business opportunities based on business stakeholders' survey data. The expansion of skills workshops, and the expansion of customized training, would be two areas that would increase business stakeholders' utilization, particularly for those business stakeholders that are not currently attending or recommending these offerings at MHCC to employees.

#### Diversity and MHCC Strengths

Diversity was discussed less than many other topics in both focus groups and the qualitative survey questions, despite being asked; however, the importance of recruiting diverse staff and instructors was noted, as was the need to embrace the cultural traditions of the community. As strengths, the English Language Learners program, the largely welcoming college staff, and the diversity of the student body were noted.

#### The Bond

When talking with business owners and business leaders, general community members, and high school parents, several overlapping themes emerged. These included a perceived lack of college involvement and connectedness with the local community; a lack of understanding about how an increase in taxes would benefit



community members individually, particularly longstanding residents with no children; the already high tax burden community members carry together with the impoverished situation many community members are living under; and, finally, a lack of understanding of how and where current funding is allocated. Focus group members also criticized the lack of early outreach to the community to describe why the previous bond was needed and to gain community buy-in for the bond.

## Recommendations

Analyses of the data from the community, business, and parent surveys, as well as narrative data from focus groups, produced seven overarching recommendations for improving the MHCC community image and strengthening partnerships.

### Increase MHCC Visibility at Business and Community Events

MHCC leadership and other representatives should routinely attend selected Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Club, and individual neighborhood association meetings to enhance and further develop relationships.

MHCC staff, together with students, should regularly host a booth at local community events across the district, such as farmers markets and street fairs to increase community outreach.

### Increase MHCC Visibility through Campus Events and Expansion of Existing Events

Focus group participants believe MHCC underinvests in promoting events that could draw more people to the campus; campus events should be expanded and leveraged to showcase and publicize MHCC program offerings to community members who attend events.

### Increase MHCC Presence in Area Schools

Increase, expand, and sustain local school connections, engaging staff and students from as early as elementary school. Respondents believe familiarizing young students with MHCC and exposing them to the possibilities there could have long-lasting effects on students' motivation to attend MHCC and parents' understanding of its affordability and financial supports.

### Expand Internet Presence and Use of Other Creative Marketing Techniques

MHCC should begin a redesign and usability testing of its website to make it more intuitively navigable. Core pages should be available at a minimum in Spanish in addition to the full site being in English. Full use of the MHCC website and Facebook page should be used to highlight interesting projects and events and to explain major decisions at MHCC that affect the community.

## Make Marketing More Specific

Some participants feel the college lacks a core identity. Be specific when speaking about the school: highlight specific academic strengths of the school by identifying the school's "areas of excellence" and promoting these.

## Solidify Community Partnerships

Establish a community college culture that emphasizes and has processes and procedures in place for communicating effectively with businesses and celebrating business partnerships. Establish creative, win-win partnerships with community organizations.

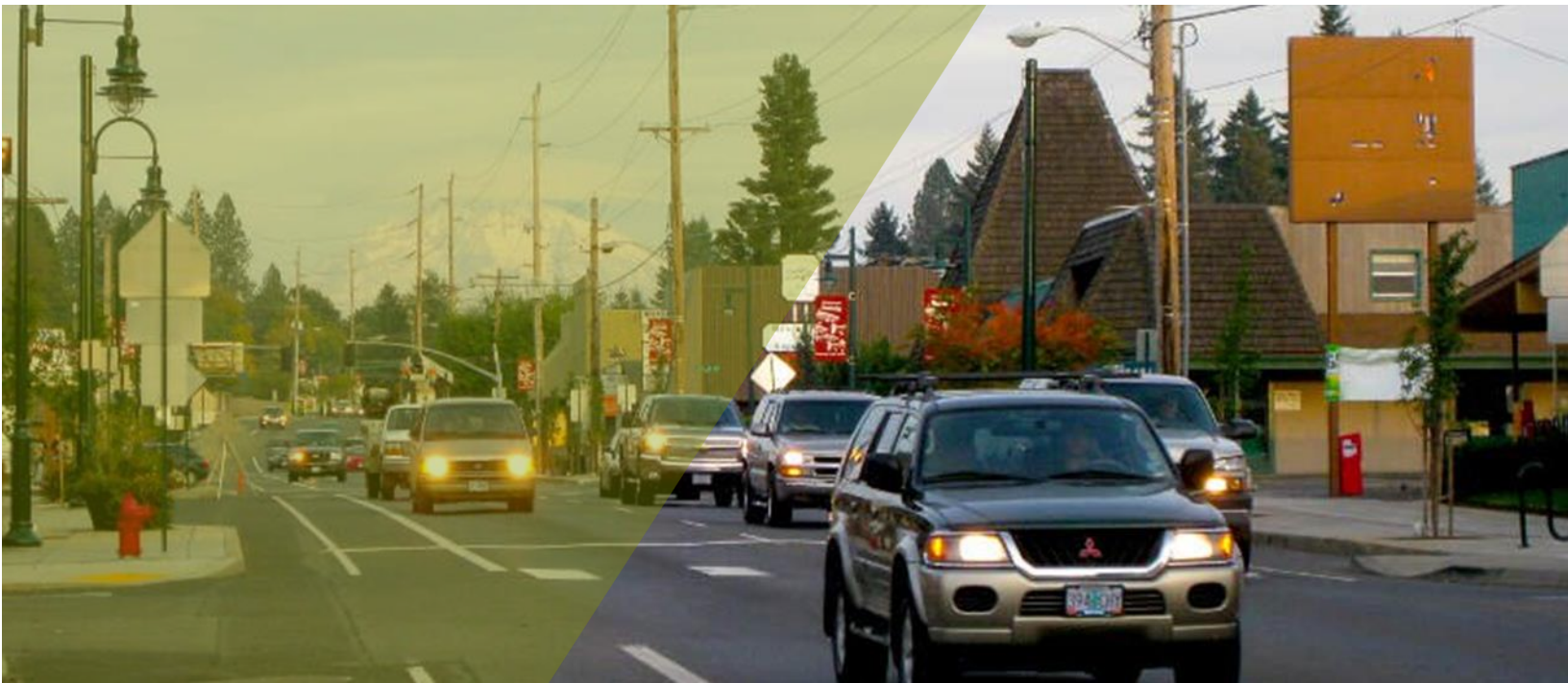
## Implement an "Adulting" (Life and Workplace Skills) Course

In addition to the Wonderlic Soft Skills Training Bootcamp, open to Adult High School Diploma students, and MHCC's college readiness classes, offer an elective Life and Workplace Skills class (Adulting Class) to students. Goals would be to increase student financial security, independence, and success gaining and maintaining employment; provide a better prepared workforce to local businesses; and differentiate MHCC from other local community colleges.

## Study Limitations

A limitation to the study is the extremely low response rate. This made it impractical to break survey data into five zones for analysis and determine with great confidence differences between zones. Additionally, only three of the nine schools within the MHCC district agreed to disseminate recruitment information about the survey, so comparisons could only be made between the three schools. And, despite the large number of survey respondents who agreed they would be willing to participate in locally held focus group meetings, relatively few attended despite the incentive that was offered and the multiple reminders that were sent. However, despite these challenges, the information we were hearing was similar across focus groups and served to give more meaning to survey responses; therefore, we believe our recommendations are well founded.

# Introduction & Study Overview



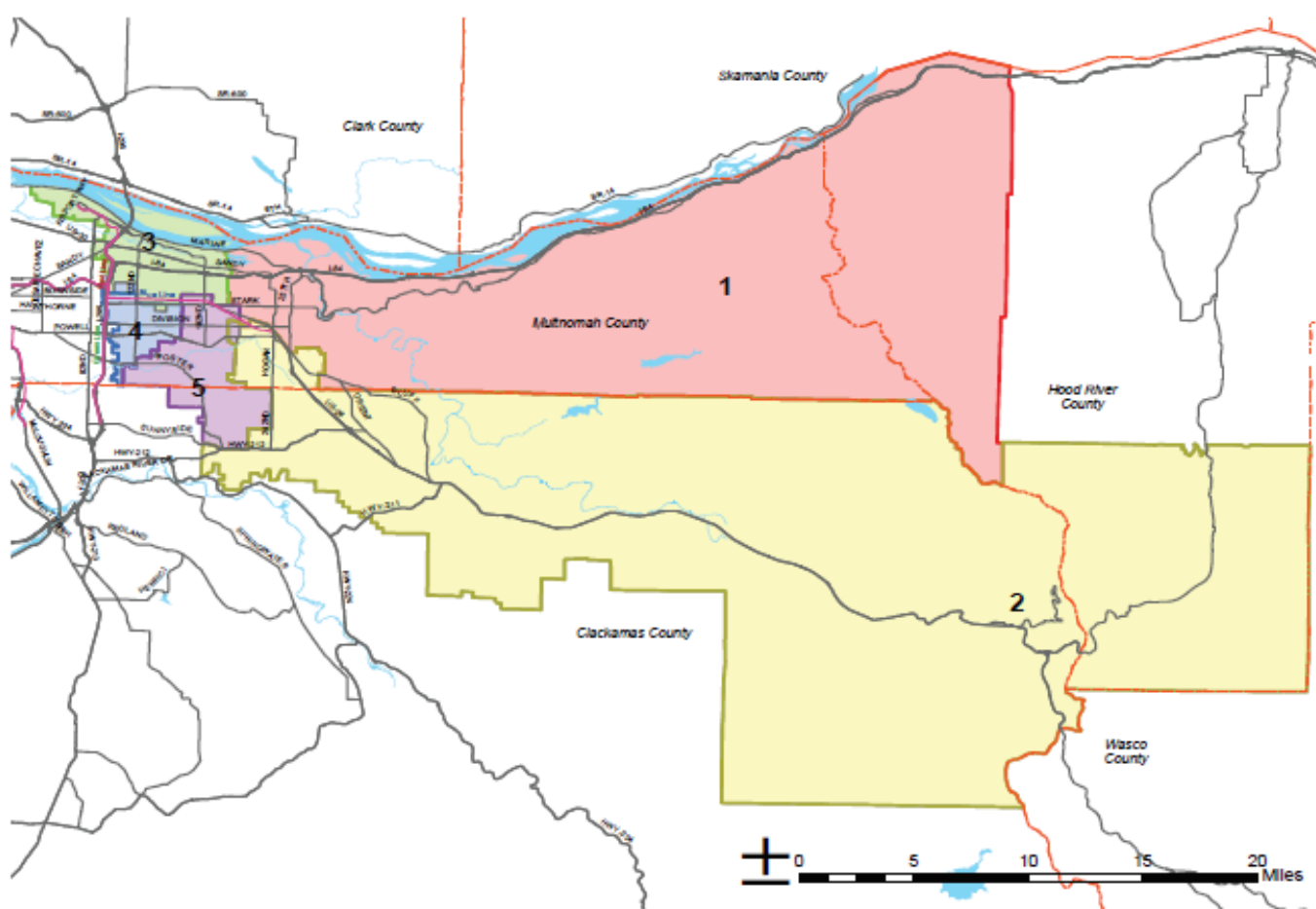
The district of Mt. Hood Community College (MHCC) covers approximately 950 square miles and includes a population of more than 300,000 residents. As shown in Figure 1, the district is split into five zones over an area that extends from Portland's NE 33<sup>rd</sup> Avenue moving east toward Cascade Locks, and from Portland's 82<sup>nd</sup> Avenue extending east through the Mount Hood corridor. MHCC's residents live in densely populated urban areas, including northeast Portland and Gresham; rural areas centered around cities such as Corbett, Damascus, Boring, and Sandy; and sparsely populated more remote areas such as Welches and Government Camp. The district is home to a diverse group of residents in urban cities and more homogenous communities in the east. Nine high schools lay within the five zones; together, these schools serve over 14,000 high schoolers grades 9-12.

Like much of the Portland Metro Area, Gresham, home to MHCC, has become more racially and ethnically diverse. The city has also experienced population growth and the issues that accompany it, including a growing homeless population, enhanced need for mental health systems, and infrastructure pressure.

To integrate MHCC more deeply with the surrounding community, enhance its responsibility to changing resident needs, and gauge public awareness of college offerings, the Office of Analytics & Institutional Research (AIR) contracted with the Human Services Research Institute (HSRI) to launch a community needs and perception study with the goal of providing current data and recommendations toward effective outreach strategies, service delivery gaps, and opportunities for new community partnerships.

Figure 1

MHCC's district covers approximately 950 square miles, is split into five zones and serves a population of over 300,000 residents.



Map Source: MHCC Fact Book, 2016-17.

## Methods

To conduct the study, we used three distinct yet overlapping data collection activities. These activities built on one another as knowledge was gained; in this way, the approach was adaptable and flexible. As we completed each data collection activity, we used the findings to reflect on and inform the subsequent data collection activity.

### Data Collection

Our methods outlined below in Activities 1 through 3 began with initial knowledge building, which included college stakeholder interviews. Using the information gained from the interviews, and in close collaboration with representatives from MHCC's Analytics & Institutional Research Department (AIR), we designed, administered, and analyzed three surveys to capture and catalogue perceptions, needs, and desires of respondents. Following the surveys, we conducted focus groups both to vet and interpret survey findings and to capture additional richness less possible via survey alone.

The three evaluation activities for the MHCC Image Study and Community Needs Assessment were:

- 1) Interviews with key college stakeholders
- 2) Surveys of:
  - a) community residents (20-question survey)
  - b) business and community leaders (19-question survey)
  - c) high school parents (19-question survey)
- 3) Focus groups targeted to each of the five zones (one ad hoc interview was also completed with a high school counselor)

#### Activity 1: Key Informant Interviews with College Staff

We began this project with a kickoff meeting and interviews with key MHCC AIR staff, as well as MHCC President Dr. Lisa Skari, Executive Director of the Development and District Communications Division Al Sigala, and Director of Marketing and Communications Lauren Griswold. During these conversations, we established project processes and captured initial data related to project context, desired survey areas of inquiry, and data collection methods. The information shared during these interviews also helped shape the surveys.

Interviews were semi-structured and, with permission, audio recorded. Interview files were uploaded to Dedoose,<sup>1</sup> a qualitative and mixed-methods web application used

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<sup>1</sup> Dedoose Version 8.0.35, web application for managing, analyzing, and presenting qualitative and mixed method research data (2018). Los Angeles, CA: SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC. [www.dedoose.com](http://www.dedoose.com).

for sorting, organizing, and analyzing data. We used Dedoose to code data, and a general deductive approach to condense interview data into meaningful and categorical summaries or findings.

### Activity 2: Surveys

Following the kickoff meeting and interviews, we designed, administered, and analyzed three distinct surveys: a survey of district residents, a survey of business and community stakeholders, and a survey of district high school parents. We worked closely with MHCC's AIR staff to develop questions and gather the perspectives of each group on the following topics:

- District residents: Current levels of awareness of services provided by the college, service gaps, or service delivery gaps
- Business stakeholders: Current levels of awareness of services provided by the college, service gaps, and identification of potential partnerships
- Parents of district high school students: Current levels of awareness of services provided by the college, perceptions of the college

We initially planned to use Oberon3's OPINIONATOR, a digital survey tool that provides the option to answer survey questions by text message (SMS), on the web, or by a phone automated voice option. While building the survey, however, we determined that the software provided an insufficient range of question types, and in the end the tool could not accommodate our needs. At the recommendation of the MHCC AIR staff, we designed our three surveys in Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool. To facilitate increased response rates, we collaborated with the director of marketing and communications on the best survey marketing techniques for each of the three surveys. We used advertising mechanisms such as mailed postcards, newspaper print advertisements, and emails to enhance recruitment of district residents for the digital survey, as well as HSRI's and MHCC's connections to reach district high school parents and business and community stakeholders.

**District Residents:** For the survey of community residents, the first outreach strategy we employed was distributing postcard mailers to individual homes in the district. Using the GIS marketing group<sup>2</sup>, we developed and sent out 12,500 mailed postcards to resident homes in each of the five zones. To select the homes, we determined the average household income in each zone, and then selected reflective USPS postal routes. A second set of postcards was mailed out to the same homes as a reminder several days later. Working with Pamplin Media Group, we followed our postcard outreach with 25,000 emails split across the five zones, also repeated the following week, and later with a print ad, posted in *The Outlook* with a distribution of between 12,000 and 13,000 copies throughout the Gresham area.

**Business Stakeholders:** To gather the perspectives of the business community, we worked with Pamplin Media Group to develop an email that would recruit business

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gisimarketing.com/>

stakeholders within the five zones to respond to our survey. They built a list of 23,210 businesses: small, medium, and large in an array of sectors within the MHCC district zones. Emails were sent to each contact email and, as a reminder, re-sent to the same email addresses four to five days later. In addition, we were provided with contact information by MHCC for businesses having participated in MHCC career fairs, business leaders associated with the MHCC foundation, a contact list for businesses having posted jobs online at MHCC, and, finally, a general list of businesses and business leaders (n= 681). One hundred and nine automatic responses of out-of-office, undeliverable, or no longer at the company were received. Once again, a follow-up reminder was sent to the same active email addresses one week later.

**High School Parents:** To gather the perspectives of parents of students from high schools within the MHCC district AIR provided us with staff contact information at each of nine within-district schools. Our initial contact was by email; if no response was received, we followed up with another email and then by telephone. School staff were asked to post an informational flyer on school notice boards and to post recruitment materials and a link to the survey on their ParentVue electronic page. With permission, we also attended a parent/teacher conference event, distributing and collecting completed hardcopy versions of the survey.

As described above, respondents initiated survey participation based on information posted publicly and/or invitations sent to specific potential respondents. Respondents had the option of completing a web- or text-based survey. Accordingly, they initiated the survey via a specified web address or by scanning a QR code. Each outreach material offered entry into a drawing for one of ten \$100 prizes.

Examples of flyers and handouts that were used to gather survey information are shown in the appendices.

### Activity 3: Focus Groups

As a follow up to the three surveys, we facilitated and hosted focus groups in each of the district's five zones. Focus groups were scheduled Tuesday through Thursday between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. to help promote attendance. Each focus group was held in a location that would be familiar to the residents of those respective zones; locations included the Maywood Center, three area libraries, and a private room in a local pizza restaurant.

Each survey included a final question asking respondents to provide contact information if they would be willing to take part in a local focus group. Based on zip codes, those who agreed to participate were invited to the focus group scheduled for their zone. Across the three surveys, 98 individuals agreed that they would be willing to participate in a local discussion regarding MHCC; however, Table 2 shows that attendance was extremely low. At least two factors may have played into this. First, due to delays in the distribution of surveys, the focus group meetings were held late in the year, very close to the holiday season. Second, on several occasions the weather was particularly difficult on the days the focus groups were held.

Due to the limited number of attendees at each of the scheduled focus group meetings, outreach was also made to local Chambers of Commerce and Rotary Clubs in each of the zones, as well as to a select number of churches—particularly those that appeared to be focused toward local ethnic groups. Only the Gresham Chamber of Commerce agreed to invite members to attend a focus group. This was held at the chamber.

Finally, based on the advice of the Reynolds High School vice principal, we conducted a telephone interview with their high school counselor to gather insights into the experiences and perceptions of minority families and their interactions with MHCC.

## Analysis

**Quantitative:** Quantitative survey data were entered into SPSS for data processing and analysis. Frequencies and crosstabs were used to compute findings, broken out where possible by location and survey respondent characteristics. The following shows the methodology used to divide survey respondents into the following groups:

- **Business:** 42% of respondents provided a zip code that denoted a business location as being outside of MHCC's district;<sup>3</sup> thus, when making comparisons between businesses in different locations, we split the respondents into four groups rather than strictly keeping to MHCC's zonal divisions: out of area (n=48); Portland within district (n=15); Gresham (n=26), and east/rural (n=25).
- **District Residents:** Also due to the low response rate and to keep between-group sample sizes slightly larger, we made the decision to split the residents' survey responses into four groups rather than keep strictly to MHCC's 5 district zones. Participants living in MHCC's zones 3, 4 and 5 were combined into one group we simply named Portland (n=28). Although the city of Gresham falls within zones 1 and 2 we hypothesized that participants living there would have differing perceptions when compared with residents from zones 1 and 2 living in the rural and more remote areas of those zones. We therefore moved Gresham responses into its own independent category (n=19) leaving the remaining rural and remote areas of zone 1 (n=36), and zone 2 (n=36) as their own categories.
- **High School Parents:** When comparing differences in parents' perspectives, we simply split the group according to the high school the parent's child attends: Corbett (n=59); Parkrose (n=118), and Reynolds (n=83).

**Qualitative:** Qualitative and open-ended questions were analyzed using Dedoose. We used a general deductive approach to condense interview data into meaningful

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<sup>3</sup> Businesses providing zip codes outside the MHCC district are likely those that have attended MHCC job fairs or other MHCC events, and for which we were provided email addresses by MHCC.



and categorical summaries or findings, as well as a constant comparison methodological approach, which enhanced our ability to compare and contrast data from one focus group to the next and consider contextual, cultural, and regional differences reflected in findings.

## Survey Participants

Despite extensive outreach the response rate for all three surveys was extremely low. The district resident survey was opened by just 123 residents; of these, 9 failed to complete more than the first question. This left a sample of 114 useable community resident surveys.

For the business community survey, 130 business owners opened the survey, but 16 completed no more than the first question. This left a sample of 114 useable business community surveys.

Three high schools—Corbett, Parkrose, and Reynolds—agreed to publicize and post the parent survey on their school’s electronic noticeboard. A total of 260 useable surveys were collected; 56 of these were collected during the Reynolds parent-teacher conference.

Each set of surveys saw a drop-off in responses as participants progressed through the questions. Major drop-offs occurred at Question 10 (district residents), Question 7 (business community), and Question 9 (high school parents).

**Table 1** Demographic Overview of Survey Respondents

	District Residents N=114	Business Stakeholders N=114	Parents of HS students N=260
<b>Current Student</b>			
No	89%	n/a	n/a
Yes, at MHCC	8%	n/a	n/a
Yes, a different CC	2%	n/a	n/a
Yes, a 4-year school	2%	n/a	n/a
<b>Length of Time in the Area</b>			
<1 year	8%	3%	3%
1-3 years	18%	2%	14%
4-6 years	11%	1%	15%
7-15 years	19%	6%	26%
>15 years	25%	51%	25%
Missing	19%	38%	18%
<b>Race/Ethnicity*</b>			
American Indian/Native American	4%	2%	3%
Asian	5%	3%	6%
Black/African American	5%	4%	9%
Hispanic/Latinx	6%	3%	14%
White Caucasian	69%	53%	52%
Other	4%	4%	6%
Missing	19%	40%	18%

	District Residents N=114	Business Stakeholders N=114	Parents of HS students N=260
<b>English as a First Language</b>			
Yes	75%	n/a	67%
No	5%	n/a	10%
Missing	19%	n/a	24%
<b>Educational Level</b>			
Less than HS graduate	-	n/a	5%
HS graduate/GED	8%	n/a	10%
Some college/no degree/no 2-year certificate	16%	n/a	24%
Associate Degree	12%	n/a	13%
Bachelor's Degree	25%	n/a	19%
Advanced Degree	19%	n/a	11%
Missing	19%	n/a	19%
<b>Annual Household Income</b>			
< \$25,000	15%	0%	9%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	9%	2%	9%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	11%	7%	9%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	11%	16%	18%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	16%	7%	15%
\$100,000 or more	18%	27%	22%
Missing	21%	41%	19%
<b>Age</b>			
<35 years old	15%	n/a	n/a
35 to 44 years old	13%	n/a	n/a
45 to 65 years old	31%	n/a	n/a
>65 years old	13%	n/a	n/a
Missing	28%	n/a	n/a
<b>Number of Employees</b>			
<10	n/a	20%	n/a
11-50	n/a	22%	n/a
51-200	n/a	27%	n/a
201-500	n/a	9%	n/a
More than 500	n/a	23%	n/a

\*Respondents were free to check more than one race.

## Focus Group and Interview Participants

Table 2 presents the number of participants who participated in each of the focus groups by zone; the majority were White/Caucasian, but 25% were persons of color and/or had English as a second language. As an encouragement to attend the focus groups, participants were notified in the focus group invitation that they would receive a \$35 incentive. The incentives were given to each focus group member at the start of the meeting. Reynolds High School parents, the Reynolds High School Counselor, and Chamber of Commerce meetings were ad hoc meetings arranged by the Reynolds High School vice principal and Gresham Chamber of Commerce

administrative personnel, respectively. Incentives were not provided for these meetings.

**Table 2 Focus Group Participants**

Focus Group Location	Zone	Participants n=32	White Caucasian n=22	Persons of Color ESL n=8	Ethnicity Unknown n=2
Troutdale Library	1	9	6	1	2
Reynolds HS (Parents)	1	2	1	1	
Reynolds (HS Counselor)	1	1	0	1	
Sandy Library	2	2	2	0	
Gresham Chamber of Commerce	2	11	10	1	
Parkrose Roundtable Pizza	3	2	1	1	
Maywood Park Center	3	1	0	1	
Midland Library	4	0	0	0	
Rockwood Library	5	4	2	2	

# Findings



The following chapter is organized in such a way that quantitatively analyzed survey results are shown within the context of information provided by focus group participants. In this way, we believe a more nuanced understanding of the information gathered can be achieved.

## Mt. Hood Community College Purpose

Mt. Hood Community College serves a diverse student body and supports attendees in an array of educational goals. Participants across the focus groups and surveys had differing ideas about the core purpose of the college. Some expressed that career guidance and academic support were most important, while others endorsed bachelor's degree preparation, low-cost education or financial assistance, credit during high school, or direct-to-work degrees/certificates as primary goals for the school. As one way to understand how district residents view the core purpose of the school, we posed three questions – each question asked district residents about their strength of feelings toward one or other of two opposing choices (business stakeholders and parents were not asked this question). The following figures (Figures 1 through 3) provide the results. The answers are disaggregated by location

(zone 1 (rural, excludes Gresham), n = 36; zone 2 (rural, excludes Gresham), n = 31; Gresham, n = 19; Portland, n = 28)<sup>4</sup>.

Figure 2

District residents believe that it's important for MHCC to provide a wide variety of educational programs.

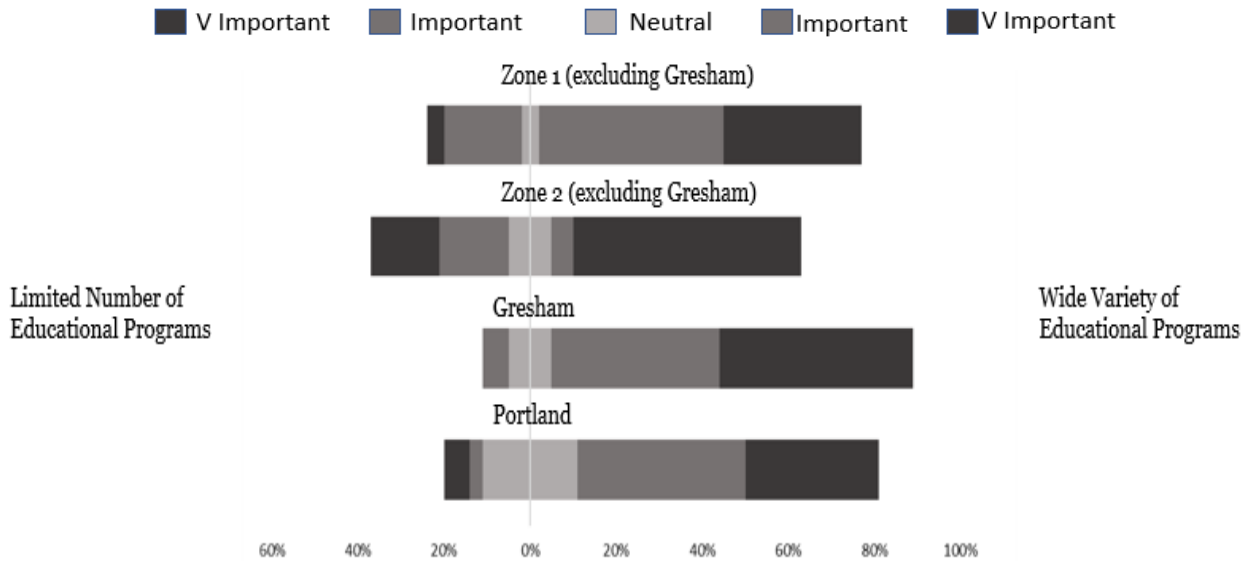
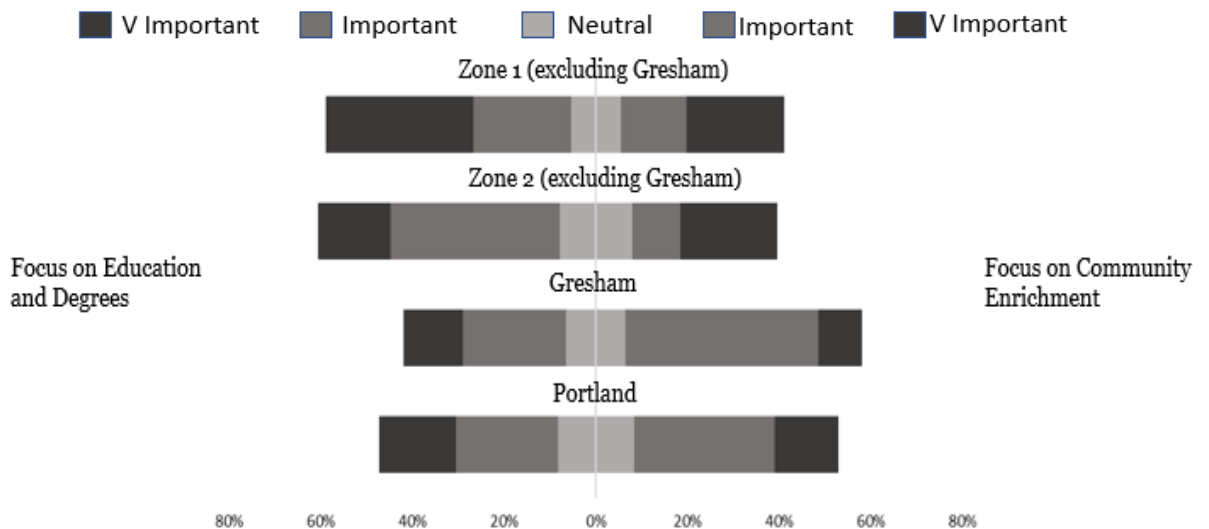


Figure 3

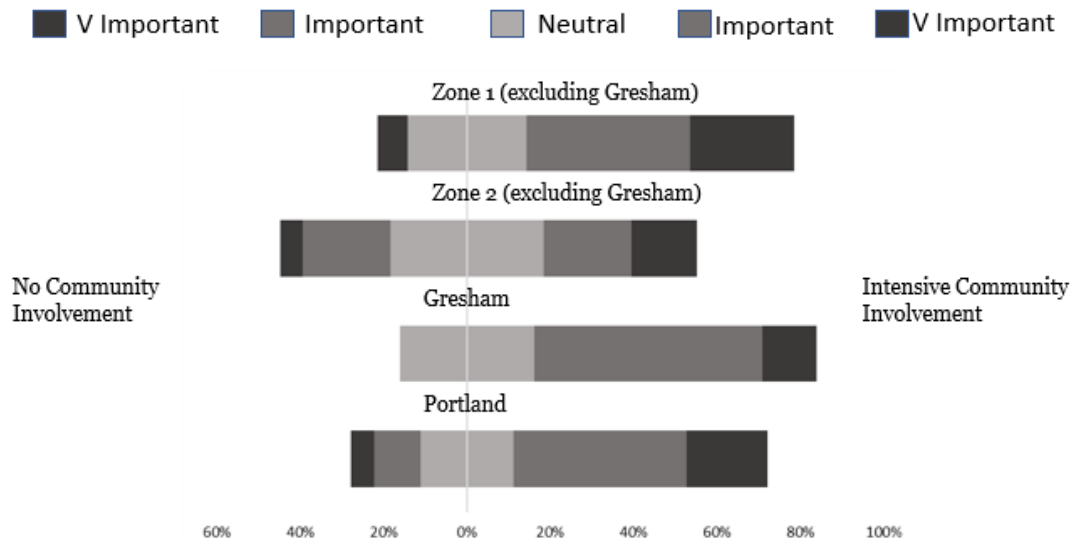
Residents living in zones 1 and 2 (excluding Gresham from those zones) suggest a focus on education and degrees is more important than community enrichment, whereas community enrichment appears to hold more importance for those living closer to the largest campus, such as residents living in Gresham and Portland.



<sup>4</sup> See page 12 for a detailed description of how the categories were broken out.

Figure 4

Although responses were mixed, intensive community involvement appears to be less important for those residents living in the rural areas of zone 2 (excluding Gresham from that zone) than for those in other parts of the MHCC district locations.



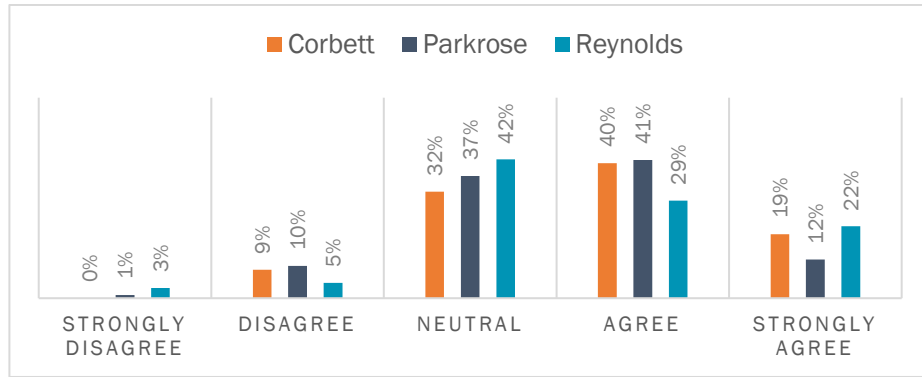
## Guidance and Support

The challenge of choosing a career, building a college plan, and transitioning from high school to college or to work are major concerns for community members, business leaders, and parents. Most focus group members were drawn to discussing these aspects, emphasizing its impact on high school youth in particular.

In surveys, high school parents were asked, “Please describe the greatest need that your high school student has that MHCC could help fill.” They highlight academic and transitional support that students need, more information and clarity about making the transition to college, and help with career exploration and guidance. Clearly, parents believe that high school guidance counseling is insufficient to assist students in tackling these challenges; however, Figures 5 through 7 show that although many parents believe that MHCC has a relatively strong partnership with their high schools, the benefits and opportunities offered by MHCC are not being fully transmitted to parents or students via high school staff or through MHCC. A similar theme also emerged during focus group discussions.

Figure 5

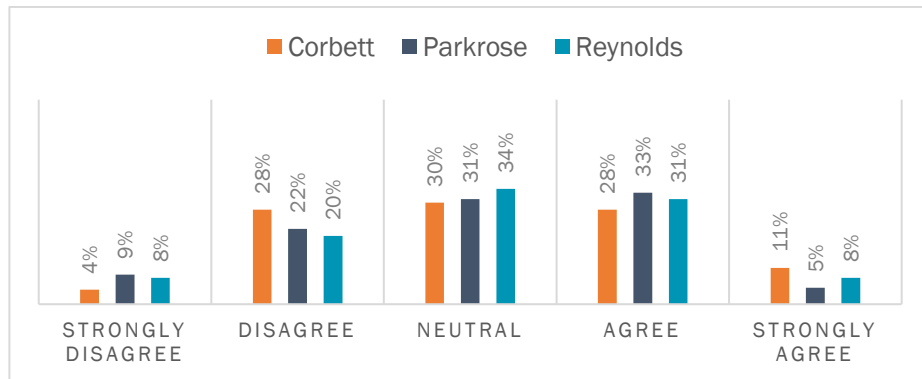
**In general parents who completed surveys believe MHCC has a relatively strong partnership with their respective schools.**



Parents responded to the statement: MHCC is a strong partner with our high school for my high school student's education.

Figure 6

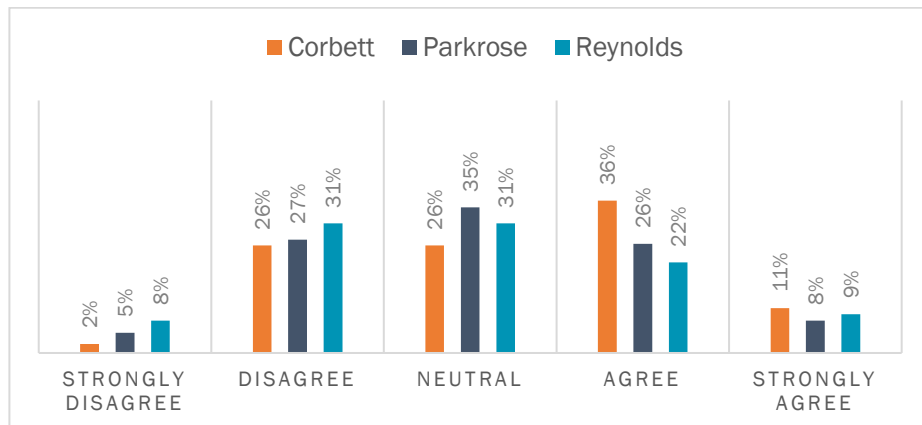
**When asked about their awareness of programs offered by MHCC that could benefit their children, a notable percentage were unaware.**



Parents responded to the statement: I am very familiar with programs MHCC offers that could be relevant for my high school student.

Figure 7

**Parents indicate a lukewarm response regarding their knowledge about MHCC's transfer options to - and dual enrollment with - 4-year schools.**



Parents responded to the statement: I am knowledgeable about MHCC transfer and dual-enrollment programs with Oregon and some Washington 4-year universities.

## Connections to Employment

Career and technical programs are important to residents, business stakeholders, and many parents, who see providing quality career and technical education as a core responsibility of community colleges, as well as an area of strength for community colleges generally. Respondents who discussed the topic voiced the hope that MHCC will continue to invest in this type of education.

The college offers many degrees and certificates designed to help students enter employment directly, but there is a belief that MHCC can do more to connect students to local employers and hands-on experiences. There was also the widespread belief that young people are not

**“There needs to be a tight relationship between the school [MHCC] and the local businesses so those who earn a trade certificate, or an associate degree, can move straight into a job in the local community.”**

prepared for college, are missing vital occupational information, and lack key skills to compete in the job market. In the view of those respondents, a major piece of Mt. Hood’s work should be promoting workforce preparedness, career exploration, and education and career planning among both MHCC enrollees and high school students.

In response to the question, “Thinking of the next five years: what will be the most important programs or services MHCC should focus on to support local businesses,” business stakeholders endorsed investment in fields that may not require a bachelor’s degree—for example, welding, automotive repair, hospitality and food service—but more generally the view was that MHCC should put more effort into fostering their students’ connections to employment.

A noted major benefit of community college education is the hands-on practical experience of many faculty. Admiration was expressed for the number of faculty teaching the skills of trades they have been working in for many years. One participant who discussed this element of community colleges’ programming noted, “Community colleges, they’ll have a lot of adjunct faculty, and that’s actually helpful to have somebody teaching you a skill, that’s their trade, they know it.”

The idea that internships, volunteering, and other hands-on opportunities might help students clarify their career aspirations was shared by many participants, but it was not the only beneficial outcome that participants identified; many respondents believe that hands-on experience helps students build work skills and connects them with local employers and employment opportunities.

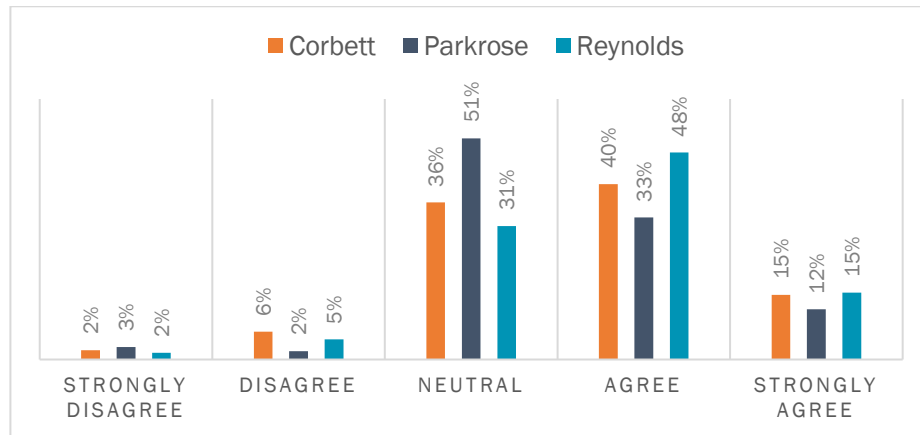
A parent discussed her vision for the school-employment connection, saying, “There needs to be a tight relationship between the school [MHCC] and the local businesses so those who earn a trade certificate, or an associate degree, can move straight into a job in the local community.” The community believes MHCC should serve as a central



partner, with a hands-on role, in connecting students with job opportunities. And while it's interesting to note that although more than half the parent respondents from each school believe MHCC has a good reputation in providing career and vocational education, less than a third of parents from each school felt knowledgeable about the programs that are offered. This clearly impacts parents in their ability to provide advice and guidance towards MHCC programs.

Figure 8

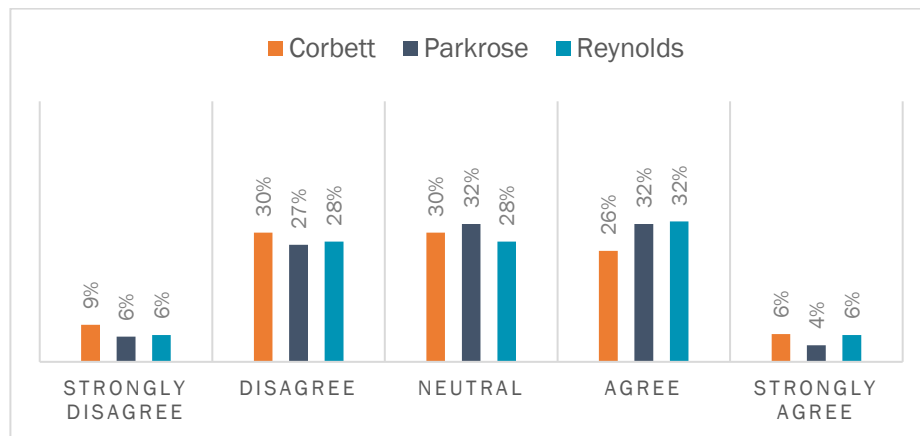
**In general, parents agree or strongly agree that MHCC provides high-quality career and vocational education.**



Parents responded to the statement: MHCC has a reputation for quality career/vocational education.

Figure 9

**Parents are mixed in their knowledge of vocational and career offerings at MHCC, with some saying they have no knowledge of the opportunities for their high school children.**



Parents responded to the statement: I am knowledgeable about the types of career/vocational and apprenticeship programs at MHCC.

This sense that technical education is uniquely strong at community colleges was reinforced by another community member who shared her opinion about MHCC: “I know that they’re really well known for their trade programs.” Unfortunately, one of the strongest themes across the focus groups and surveys is a sense that MHCC is weakening their commitment to providing quality career and technical training.

In all but two focus groups, program suspensions or cuts arose as a topic of conversation, and participants who had not heard about cuts previously were alarmed by the areas chosen to be eliminated or reduced. A large number of participants had the sense that Mt. Hood has been phasing out or weakening valuable programs. One respondent summed up her dissatisfaction with the school's priorities this way, "I love the concept of community college, getting people trades without very much debt, but I am very disappointed in what we're doing with those resources." Community members believe that providing low-cost opportunities for students to gain trade or technical skills is a central responsibility of a community college, and they are concerned that MHCC may be weakening this role.

### General Education Diploma and High School Equivalency

Mt. Hood Community College provides high school-equivalency options to learners who wish to complete this credential. Across the surveys and focus groups, only three participants discussed MHCC's support for GED or high school equivalency students. Still, those who mentioned it believe that community colleges should provide opportunities to earn this credential. One participant stated, "At many community colleges GED courses are readily available, free, and convenient." She highlights that providing GED courses is a basic role of community colleges.

### High School College Credit

High school parents who participated in the survey and focus group conversations were grateful that MHCC has programs that provide college credit to high school-aged learners. Twenty-five percent of parents stated that the opportunity to earn credit before high school graduation was the greatest support MHCC could provide to their student. Moreover, the importance that this has to parents is also illustrated in the Importance/Performance questions illustrated in Figure 24.

Overall, parents are excited about the variety of ways students can gain college credit during secondary school, but some feel MHCC needs to improve communication about the goals, processes, and limits of these programs. For example, two parents shared that their children, who both applied and were accepted to the Middle College Program (MCP), received mixed messages from MHCC about how the program works. One student's goal had been to graduate early from high school and earn some college credit in the process. She went as far as registering for MHCC courses before finally receiving clear information that her participation in MCP would delay her high school graduation. The other student also found that initial paperwork, in-person orientation, and other information provided about the program did not clarify credit equivalency or program length, leading him to believe that he would be able to get an associate degree and a high school diploma by his original high school graduation date. Instead, he will need to study at MHCC for an additional year to complete his associate degree.

## Continuing Education

Despite open-ended questions and probing for answers around continuing education at MHCC, this was not widely discussed in focus groups or survey responses. Still, some participants did raise the topic. A forest fire management team leader shared that many people in his field start at an entry level, build some experience, and then go to MHCC to hone their knowledge. He sees this as a benefit both to his employees, who have the opportunity to gain real-life experience and enhance that experience through college courses, as well to the local community. The belief that providing education for mid-career adults wishing to extend their knowledge or change careers is a responsibility of community colleges, though not a frequent topic, is felt to be important to industry and to the community at large.

## Administration and Management

Administration and management of the college was a frequent topic in group conversations and survey responses. In narrative survey responses a few survey participants shared broadly critical but unspecific feedback. Focus groups tackled the topic with more depth and three core concerns arose across conversations:

- frequent turnover in school administration,
- lack of visibility and involvement of leaders in the community, and
- failure to communicate the logic behind contentious decisions.

**Turnover:** One concern among community members is a sense of ever-evolving priorities and governance due to frequent changes to the school's leadership. Business leaders who attended our focus group at the Gresham Chamber of Commerce were especially concerned about the changeability of MHCC's administration, and the rapid succession of presidents over the past years. One participant expressed her concern this way: "They need leadership that's stable. In the 17 years I've been here, they've had five or six presidents." Another said, "Every new board that comes in every four or eight years has new priorities and hires new deans." These participants, who've been working with the college for years, believe that continued personnel changes at the top of the school's administration produce scattershot decisions and policies that destabilize the school. They reject the idea that changing leadership is a cure-all for addressing problems, instead arguing that leadership retention could help strengthen the school. But this group was not alone in their thoughts about this; it was hammered home at another focus group meeting that when there is an issue with MHCC, rather than respond to the problem, the school hires a new president. Many community members believe that to solve any number of issues at MHCC, the first step is to establish, and then retain, strong and stable leadership.

**Leadership Visibility:** Leadership's level of visibility and engagement in the community was too low and too varied for some who attended the focus groups. This concern was especially prominent among business leaders. One participant who has been engaged in the local business community for 40 years said that engagement with

the community has fluctuated with each new president. She says, “I remember several presidents that were at everything and several that were never at anything, you had to go to their office to see them.” There was much agreement that top leadership should have a more obvious presence at community events and that this had been lacking in recent years. The visibility and engagement of MHCC leadership and other representatives is viewed as evidence of the school administration’s investment, or lack thereof, in the community at large, and in the school’s ability to identify and be aware of local community and business needs. This in turn diminishes the community’s engagement with, and willingness to invest in the school.

**Communicating Major Decisions:** In addition to concerns about engaging with the community, participants feel that the school does not adequately explain its reasoning to the public. During discussions on courses, cuts, and program changes at MHCC, many expressed being puzzled by recent choices the school has made. Some focus group participants described themselves as close partners of the school, but still felt that they did not understand, or could not explain, decisions like the suspension of portions of the automotive, nursing, cosmetology, and other technical programs, while at the same time hearing about the allocation of funding for pool and administrative office upgrades. Many concluded that MHCC is out of touch with the needs of the community and business. Communication challenges and courses are discussed in more depth elsewhere in this report.

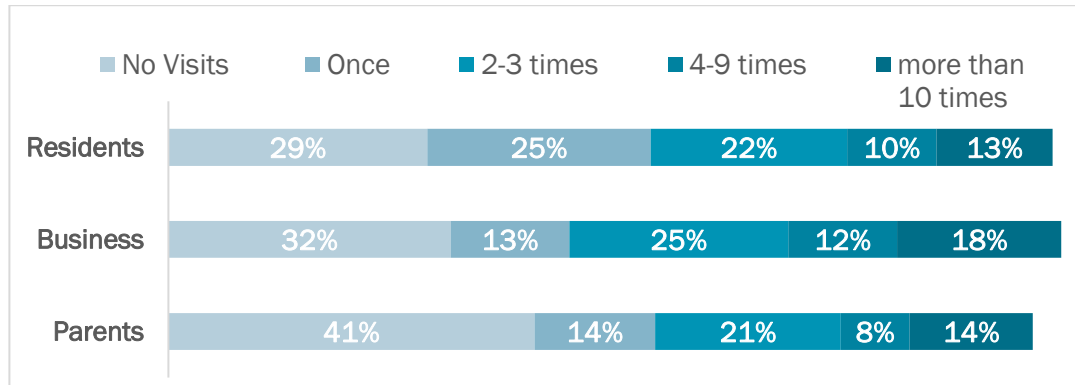
## Resident, Business, and Parent Familiarity with MHCC Campuses

Mt. Hood Community College is home to three campus locations: the majority of courses are held at the largest campus, located in the heart of Gresham. The Bruning Center for Allied Health and Education is also located in Gresham, approximately three miles from the largest campus, and admits a nursing cohort of approximately 32 students twice yearly. The Maywood Park Center is an older building, located approximately 10 miles from the largest Gresham campus, close to the edge of the MHCC’s westerly district boundary. The emphasis at this center is adult basic education, English as a second language, and Head Start and family support services.

We were interested to understand how familiar district residents, business stakeholders, and high school parents are with each of the three centers and asked survey participants to tell us how often they have visited each of the three campuses over the past year. We felt this information could be taken as a proxy for understanding the community’s engagement and familiarity with the school, and to some extent its familiarity with programs and events that occur at the campuses.

Figure 10

Fewer than 50% of resident and parent respondents describe visiting the Gresham campus more than once in the past year, but business stakeholders were more likely than others to visit the campus frequently.



Surprisingly, given the potential of MHCC as a resource, 41% of parent respondents noted no visits to the Gresham campus over the past year.

Perhaps less surprisingly, given the specialist foci of the other MHCC centers, 95% of residents, 90% of parents, and 90% of business stakeholders stated no visits to the Bruning Center over the past year, and 89% of district residents, 90% of business stakeholders, and 82% of parents stated no visits to the Maywood Park Center in the prior year.

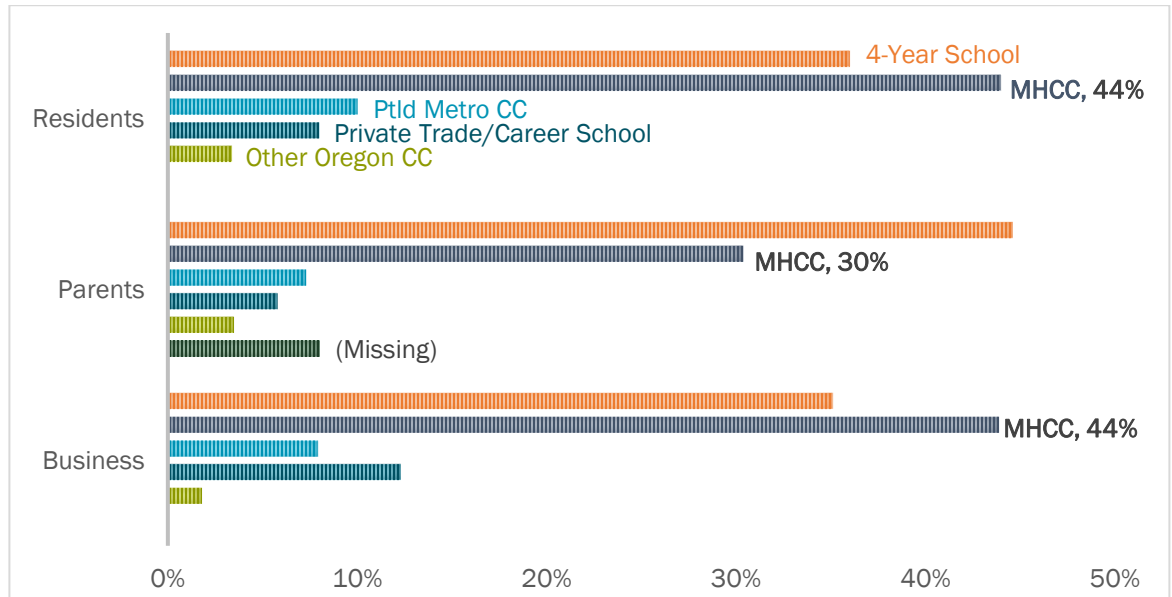
## School Selection

School selection was discussed during focus groups and arose in the responses of some survey respondents. Largely, the strengths and weaknesses of community colleges were weighed collectively and contrasted against 4-year public and private institutions, but some responses drew contrasts between other junior colleges as well. This is discussed in more detail below.

Across all surveys, participants were asked to rank which school would be their primary recommendation for education out of five options including a 4-year school, a Portland metro community college, an Oregon community college, a private trade school, and MHCC. Both district residents and business owners opted for MHCC as their first choice, but 45% of parents said they would prefer a 4-year school for their child. Narrative responses to the surveys suggest that some parents prefer a 4-year school because they believe the experience of living away from home will be educational for their child; other's simply describe that their child wants, or they want their child, to attend a 4-year school with no other reasons provided.

Figure 11

District residents and business owners tend to choose MHCC as their first recommendation for further education, whereas parents tend to choose a 4-year school for their children.



We also wanted to understand if recommendations would change depending on the location of each set of respondents. The following set of figures show the results of those analyses.

Figure 12

District residents living within the Portland city limits are less likely than other residents to recommend MHCC as their first choice.

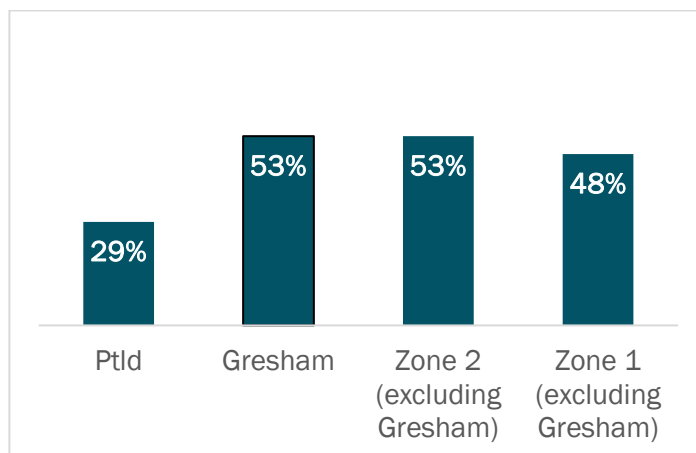
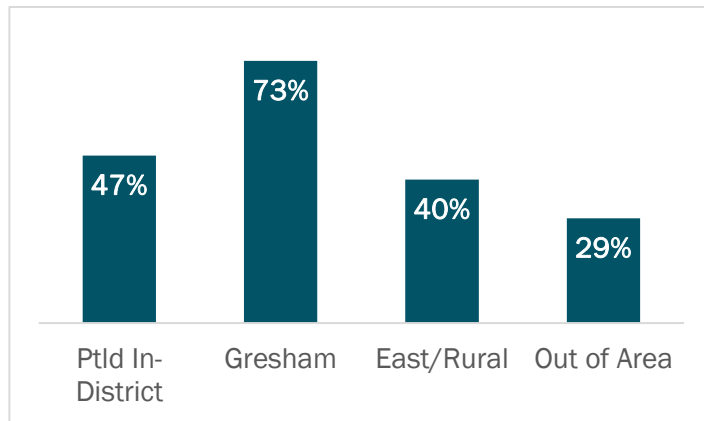


Figure 13

Gresham business stakeholders were more likely than others to recommend MHCC to their employees as an option for further education.

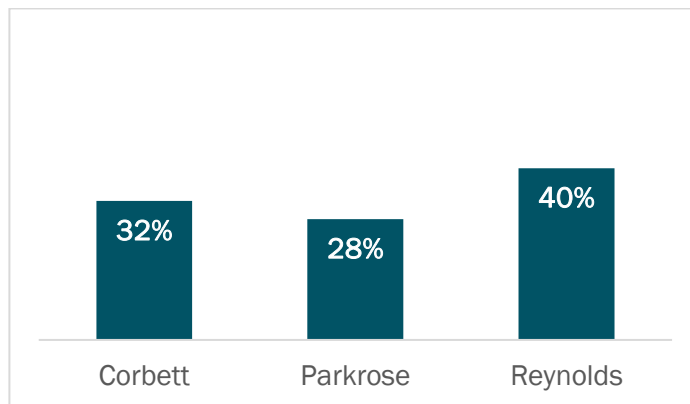


Forty-two percent of the business owners surveyed came from areas outside of the MHCC district. These were likely business owners whose email contact information had been provided by MHCC as having attended prior career fairs and other activities.

As might be expected, business stakeholders whose businesses were located outside the MHCC district were less likely to choose MHCC as a recommendation. They were more likely than others to recommend Portland Community College over and above MHCC, likely based on distance from the MHCC campus.

Figure 14

Reynolds' parents were more likely than parents from Corbett or Parkrose to nominate MHCC as their first choice of school.

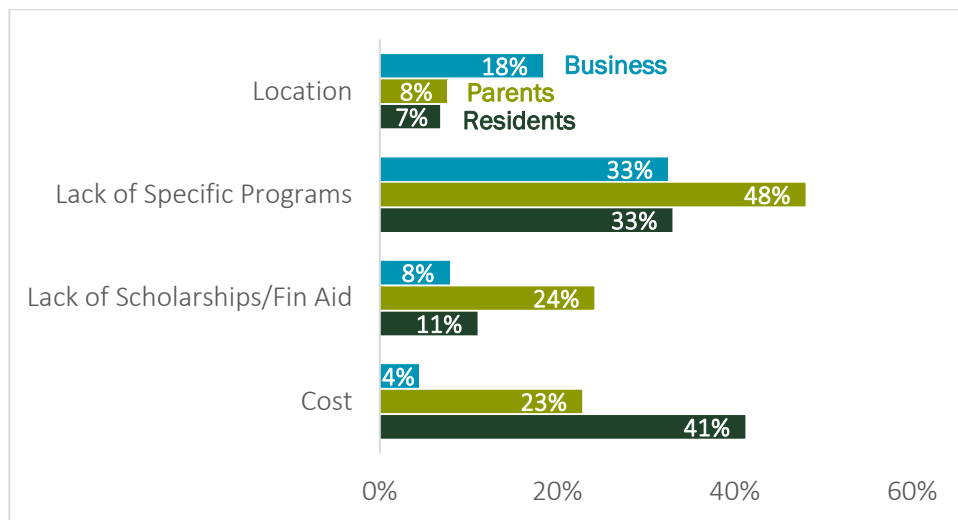


### Selection Reasons

Survey respondents were also asked to select reasons why they might choose a different college over MHCC; they could select as many reasons as they wished from the answer choices we provided. It should be noted that although the question asked respondents to nominate reasons for **not** recommending MHCC as an option for further education, many narratively responded that in fact they **would** nominate the school—this was especially true for business stakeholders.

Figure 15

Cost was the major reason district residents selected as a reason not to choose MHCC; a lack of programs specific to their students' interests was the primary reason high school parents gave.



#### Cost and Financial Aid

A general theme across all focus groups was how valuable community college can be for students wanting to explore career directions at lower cost before transferring to complete a bachelor's degree. One community member said it this way: "You haven't wasted a lot of money figuring out what you want to do." Affordability of further education is important to all. Most who addressed the topic believe MHCC is affordable, and that a transfer degree is a good, lower-cost option compared with four years at a university for students seeking a bachelor's degree. Of the 21 survey respondents across the three surveys who addressed affordability in response to the narrative survey question, "What word or short phrase comes to mind when you think of MHCC," all stated that they thought the school was affordable. Common responses included "cost effective" and "low cost." This sentiment was echoed during focus groups. But, as shown in Figure 15, the cost of MHCC was also a major concern, especially among district residents (41%); this likely implies that cost would be a reason for them deciding not to acquire further education from any institution.

Despite the widely held perception that MHCC is a cost-effective option, many *parents* who responded to the narrative question, "Please describe the greatest need your high school student has that MHCC could help fill," mentioned the need for financial aid and scholarships. So, while parents largely viewed MHCC as a comparatively inexpensive option for their students' higher education, it appears that many are still concerned about covering their child's college costs. Interestingly, in further analyses, this concern held regardless of parents' income level or minority status.

Some respondents believe that low-income people often do not believe that college, in any form, is an option for them. One person indicated that she hears friends of her son say that they don't think they can go to college. She says, "They think their



parents can't afford it and that they wouldn't qualify for financial aid." Some high school students don't understand the array of financial options available and believe that college is closed to them. One high school administrator shared what he is doing to address this issue. Once a month, he meets with parents of seniors to make sure they understand the connection between a student's grades and their access to education funding. He shares how he explains this to parents: "The GPA of a student equals money... you have 2.5, that means you will have Oregon Promise." He is pushing the message that school can be accessible financially, but says students and families have to plan ahead to be eligible. Although the high school is working on it, this administrator, along with participants across focus groups, felt that students would profit from the college also pushing this information and being involved earlier. High schools need support from the college to excite students about the opportunities available through MHCC and to understand the steps parents and students must take to get there.

### Location

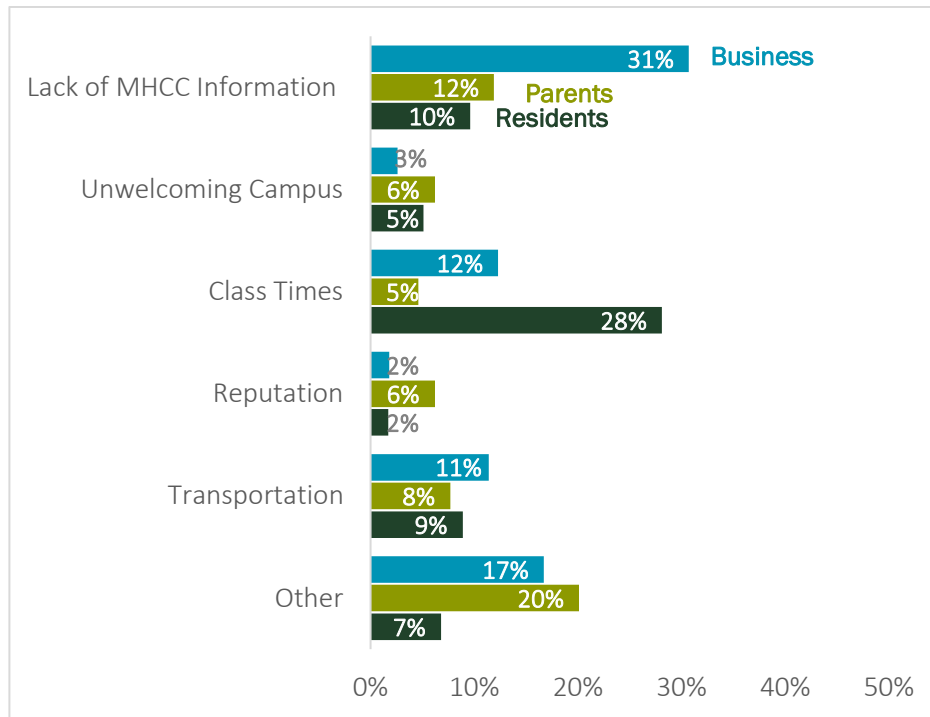
Focus group participants who believed that location was a primary factor in the selection of a school for further education were split on whether they would select MHCC, largely based on the school's proximity to their homes in comparison to other institutions and the availability of a personal vehicle. Residents in the Rockwood area felt that the school was convenient to their homes, and residents living further east, in Sandy and Rhododendron, believed that MHCC was more accessible than other schools. On the other hand, parents who lived near Parkrose High School expressed that the East Portland Community College (PCC) campus on 82<sup>nd</sup> was much more convenient to their homes, both in driving time and in terms of the availability of mass transit options. One parent shared that the Middle College Program with MHCC was difficult for her family to access while PCC would have been easier: "It was frustrating because PCC is about seven minutes away." It can be extrapolated that this is also most likely the reason that those residents living within the Portland city limits (Figure 12), and parents from Parkrose High School (Figure 14) are less likely than others to recommend MHCC.

### Course Offerings

The advantages and disadvantages of a multiple campus structure also arose, and participants had diverging perspectives. One shared that she might choose PCC because she felt there would be more flexibility in where she could take classes. Another respondent said that MHCC's one central campus is an advantage because there is less chance of having to take a course at a campus across town. Several respondents agreed that location is not the only factor and that cost, reputation, or special programming could draw them to a school that was further from their homes. A participant from Sandy agreed, saying that although MHCC is closest for her high school students, if another school had better offerings in the student's area of interest, she would prioritize the educational program from the alternate school.

Figure 16

Class times were seen as a barrier for MHCC district residents, while being unsure of how to start classes was noted as a barrier by business owners.



#### Lack of MHCC Information

Several participants noted the difficulty in navigating MHCC’s website. Indeed, it was described as the determining factor by one person for not choosing MHCC as a place to study. One parent who had English as a second language recommended translating core parts of the MHCC website so parents who have English as a second language can more easily obtain accurate information and support their children in their decision making.

Other participants noted the vast number of programs and classes available at MHCC and described how overwhelming this could be when flipping through the mailed MHCC booklet, making it difficult to absorb the information. Another lamented that she no longer receives a mailed MHCC booklet, indicating that this impacted her knowledge of classes.

#### Campus

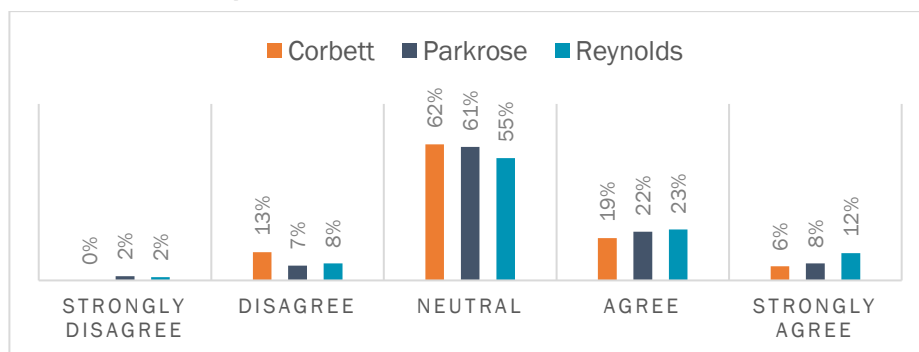
Campus descriptions were varied. A few described MHCC as dark, old, and dilapidated and in need of new equipment, whereas others described it as welcoming, a great campus, and having beautiful grounds. For some, the buildings themselves are seen as having historical architectural value; they believe this aspect, together with the natural beauty of campus and its proximity to Portland, the Pacific Ocean, and Mount Hood’s recreational activities, should be leveraged for marketing purposes to a far wider population.

## MHCC Reputation

By and large participants who have firsthand experience of MHCC are complimentary about the school and the quality of its educational offerings; however, based on survey responses it appears that many parents are unsure about the rigor of one and two hundred-level academic classes when compared with 4-year universities.

Figure 17

**Across all three high schools, many parents are unsure whether MHCC academic classes are as rigorous as those offered by universities.**



Parents responded to the statement: MHCC's 100 and 200 level academic classes are as rigorous as classes at Oregon's 4-year universities.

A perceived stigma of attending a community college was described more than a few times. For example, there was concern expressed that a degree from a community college may be less respected by employers; another described that as a teenager, the notion of attending a local community college was perceived as less successful than moving away to something “bigger and better.” She believes this opinion is still held by youth today. Stigma was also echoed by parents—one of whom described her children as “academic—the implication being that a community college is a second-class option.

An emphasis on academic degrees over certifications or job skills training may prevent some students from continuing their education. A participant shared that she hears from young people that high school counselors push students, including those students who have struggled academically, away from exploring the trades. Another respondent agrees saying, “Struggling students who aren’t ready for college aren’t hearing about other options that will lead to good jobs. If the choice is college or nothing, they’re going to pick nothing.” The concern that students are not receiving good information about the options available to them, and not receiving support to explore possible paths, was pervasive in the focus groups and surveys.

Another concern noted was a fear that credits will not transfer properly. Messages highlighting the ease of transfer, and the fact that a student’s bachelor degree will be issued by the 4-year institution where the degree is completed, might assuage some hesitations. One participant expressed it this way: “It doesn’t hurt to remind students that if they want the prestige of a university or 4-year college on their transcript, wherever you finish your degree, that is where your degree is from.”

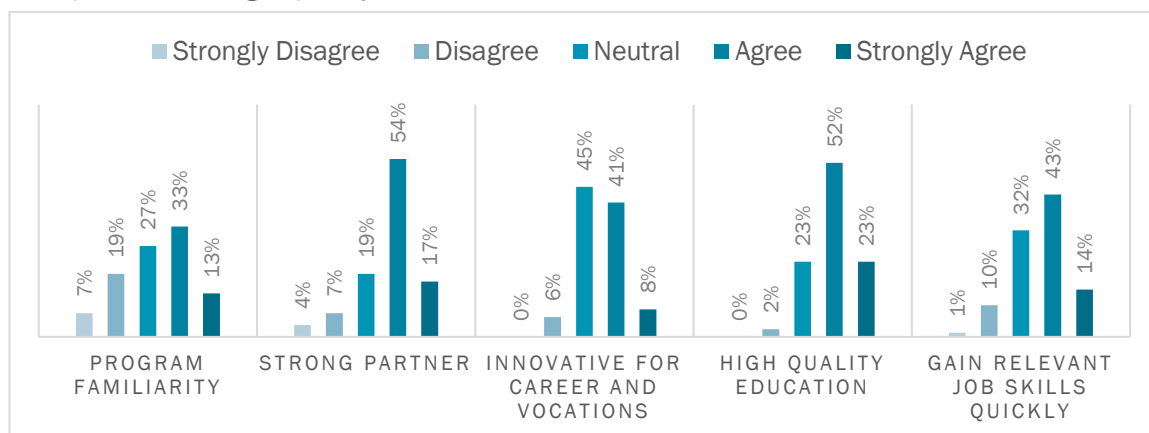
It is also important to consider how individual staff, or seemingly small events, can positively or negatively impact individual perceptions. These perceptions may then be relayed to others. Several survey and focus group participants described positive feelings about MHCC, but, notably, a few described experiences that had negatively colored their impressions of the school.

For example, one mentioned a feeling that the new Student Services HUB felt unwelcoming. Given its centrality, it is very important that HUB staff are welcoming to students and well informed about the school. These staff may be some of the first staff potential students interact with and can impact perceptions positively or negatively in ways that can have longstanding consequences. This person also described her experience of being teased by a staff member some years ago because of her Eastern European accent. This had caused her to avoid MHCC for many years.

### Reputation: Business Stakeholders

Figure 18

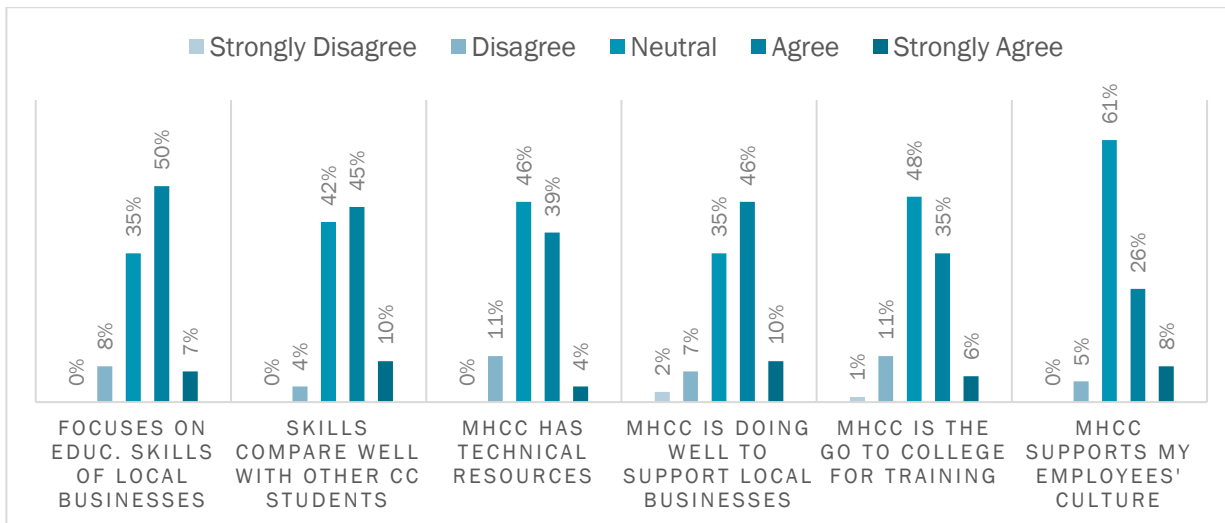
**Over 50% of business stakeholders perceive MHCC to be a strong industry partner that provides a high-quality education.**



Despite the critiques of MHCC made by business stakeholders during focus group meetings, MHCC is well respected for the education it provides and many survey respondents believe MHCC to be a strong partner with their business. However, Figure 18 shows that less than 50% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they are familiar with programs offered at MHCC; similarly, less than 50% agree or strongly agree that MHCC is an innovative place for career and vocational training. It's likely that the limited visibility of MHCC in the local community and during business stakeholders meetings, noted during focus group discussions, contributes to reduced knowledge of program offerings and innovations at the school.

Figure 19

While over 50% of business stakeholders agree or strongly agree that MHCC focuses on the educational needs of local businesses, fewer believe that the college has the technical resources to do this.



### Transportation

Survey respondents, including business stakeholders, district residents, and parents of high school students from throughout the region responded to the prompt, “What word or short phrase comes to mind when you think of MHCC Community College.” Fifty-six participants’ responses addressed physical accessibility. The vast majority stated that the school was easy to travel to and from, with words like “convenient,” “accessible,” or “close to home” being common answers. Only a few stated that the school was far away or inconvenient.

However, in focus group meetings, several participants discussed the importance of physical proximity in school selection. A few speculated that community members might choose between PCC, MHCC, and other community colleges simply based on the distance of the school to their homes. Others said that location would be a consideration if they were to select a school now or that it had been a consideration in a previous school selection decision.

Of four participants who made a judgement about MHCC’s accessibility to their home, all believed that residents in their areas (Rockwood, Sandy, and Rhododendron) have relatively easy access to the school. A Rhododendron resident also indicated that it was possible, though not necessarily easy, to get to MHCC via public transit.

Despite the overall belief that the school is accessible, one discussion involving several members of the Troutdale focus group touched on the unsuccessful efforts to extend a Max line to MHCC and discussed poor mass transit options in East County in general. Transportation challenges may particularly impact students at the edges of MHCC’s district, and those without personal vehicles may be especially affected by the lack of public transportation options. One participant suggested that placing MHCC shuttles at nearby transportation hubs could shorten travel time and make MHCC feel more

accessible. This change would not solve all transportation challenges, but it might mitigate the issue for some students.

### Online Classes

As a follow-up to our discussion about transportation and the possible difficulties in accessing MHCC due to lack of transportation or difficulty in accessing a class due to scheduling times, we asked focus group members whether an increase in online classes would be a good avenue for MHCC to take. We were surprised to hear little enthusiasm for this as an option. A high school counselor noted the increased need for internal motivation and suggested that many of her high school students were lacking the type of motivation that completing an online course would require. One parent whose child is enrolled in the MCP described her son's difficulty with his online course; this included difficulty navigating the software and receiving feedback for coursework. Finally, a district resident opined that a person who wants to take an online class can take it from any school. She felt this would not necessarily increase the likelihood of enrollments into MHCC.

## Community Perceptions

As a further insight into the communities' thoughts and perceptions of the school, all three surveys requested that respondents provide us with the first word or phrase that comes to mind when thinking about MHCC. A word cloud (Figure 20) was generated from the responses we received. The larger the word, the greater the number of people who expressed the sentiment. As shown, the larger community has a range of thoughts and ideas associated with the school. It should be noted that while there was some variation in resident, business, and parent attitudes toward MHCC, with a few exceptions, individuals who described having direct experience of being a student at Mt. Hood Community College or those who had worked at the college reported positive experiences and affection for the college.

In fact, one survey respondent described MHCC as "an underappreciated gift to East County." This sentiment was reiterated during the Gresham Chamber focus group meeting, and nearly all agreed, despite other critiques, that the college is a great asset to the community, with huge potential that they want to succeed.

Nonetheless, it was noted by some community members that in order to know more about the college, its programs, and current events, it's necessary to deliberately seek out that information; the information from their perspectives isn't readily available or widely publicized.



Figure 21

District residents, business stakeholders, and high school student parents say email, regular post, and the MHCC website are effective communication methods.

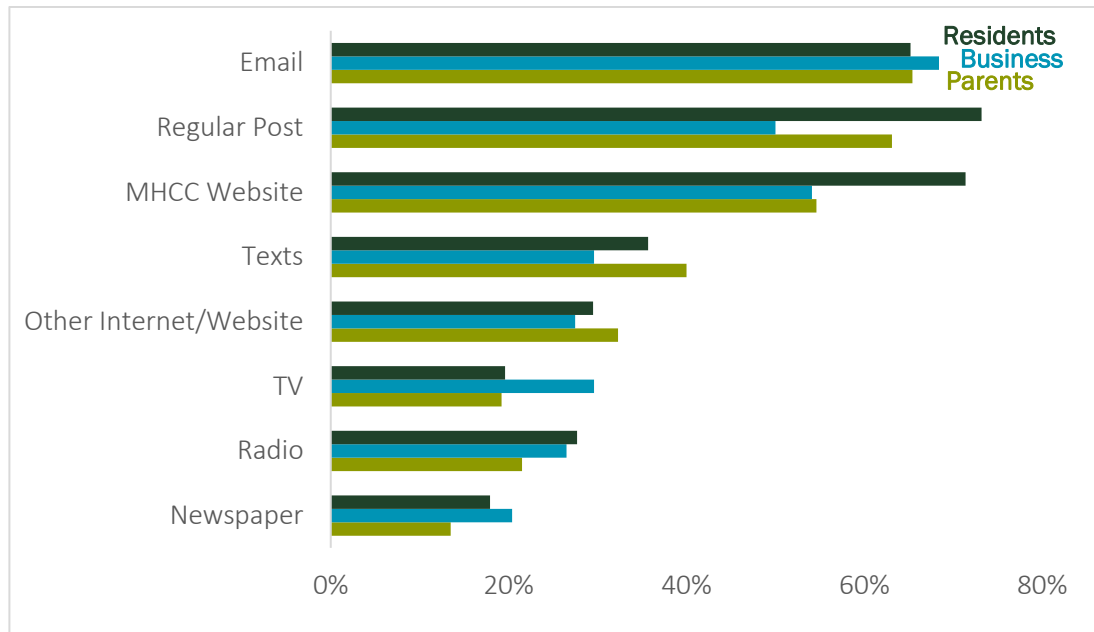
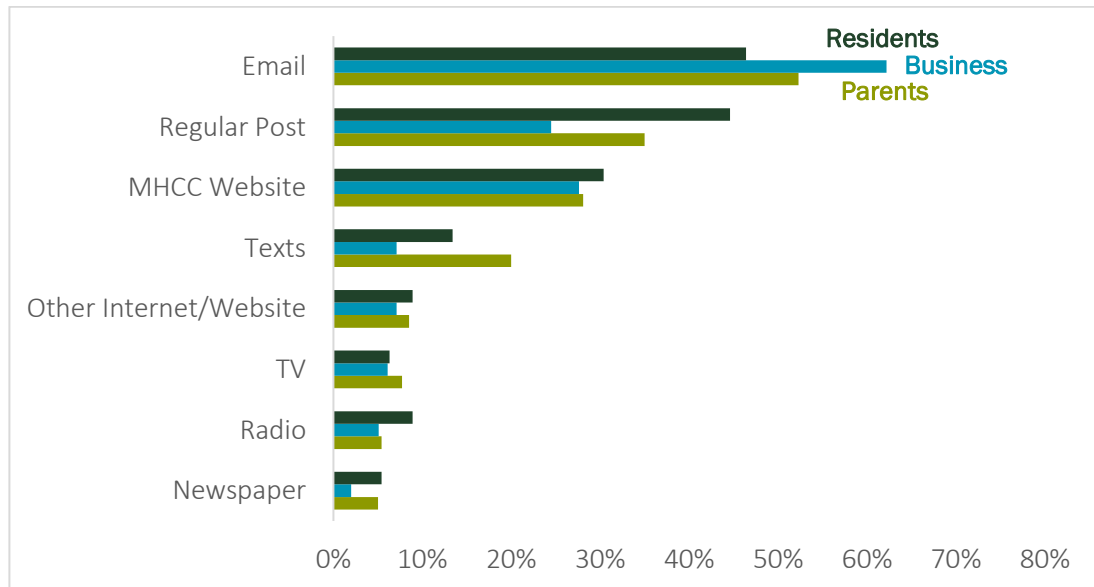


Figure 22

When asked to tell us which mechanism was the best for communicating MHCC opportunities, email, regular post, and the MHCC website were identified as the best three ways.





## Alternative Communication Strategies

Participants identified several communication strategies for extending the reach of MHCC, including increasing the school's visibility in the community, partnering with primary and secondary schools, using technology, and being creative in other ways.

### MHCC Visibility

A common concern among business leaders, and also community members more broadly, was the absence of MHCC representatives at events and meetings in the community.

One participant expressed her opinion

**“Unless you seek them out, you don’t know about them. They need to be in the community advertising themselves, people don’t know they [MHCC] are a hidden gem.”**

this way: “Unless you seek them out, you don’t know about them. They need to be out in the community advertising themselves, people don’t know they [MHCC] are a hidden gem.” This comment reflects a larger sentiment, which is that the school has much to offer, but the public is not aware either of the breadth of its offerings or the quality of its instructors. Many participants compared MHCC’s advertising efforts with those of other organizations and schools. Several participants highlighted the National Guard and military branches as exemplars of the right way to reach out. One parent said this about her experience when her son was in high school: “The National Guard, or another branch of the military was always there, community events, festivals, city activities, schools and school events with giveaways, pull-up contests, something to get young people interested and engaged.” Another participant built on this idea, discussing Warner Pacific’s advertising. He said, “Warner Pacific advertises way more than MHCC, even though they don’t have any money. You hear much more about them from every source—Billboards, community newspapers, bus wraps, TV ads—even on Jerry Springer.” Both highlight that there is an absence of representation, advertising, and information about MHCC in public spaces and in the public consciousness.

### MHCC Collaboration with High Schools and Elementary Schools

Community visibility was important to participants, but parents, community members, and business stakeholders were equally passionate about the need to increase MHCC’s presence in public schools from high school down to elementary. Participants share a belief that engagement with schools should start early. A general sentiment shared in the focus groups is that MHCC must implement a concerted effort to collaborate with, and establish a solid presence in, local high schools. A local high school guidance counselor shared that though MHCC invites counselors to their campus once a year to highlight a few college programs, MHCC does not have a large presence in her school. The lack of MHCC presence in some schools has other

repercussions—one high school representative noted that she would have invited MHCC to the most recent parent/teacher conference. She felt having them at the meeting could have been extremely beneficial to parents and youth, but MHCC’s general lack of presence meant the college hadn’t been in the forefront of her mind.

In searching for better models of engagement with high schools and students, several participants again turned to the military’s recruitment methods. One participant said this: “The military is in the schools. They’re in the cafeteria, before school, in the forum, once a week or twice a month so that students get comfortable with them and feel that they can ask questions. They’re in there all the time, and that is what MHCC needs to do. Why wouldn’t you?” These steps were seen as a way to ensure that students understand that MHCC is an option for them and to create enough familiarity with students that they feel comfortable asking questions and engaging with MHCC representatives.

Focus group attendees also encouraged MHCC to think creatively about deepening their connection with schools in ways that go beyond setting up a table a few times a year. Instead, they suggested ideas like sending instructors to schools to give a guest lecture; deputizing MHCC freshmen or sophomores as peer mentors and having them go to area high schools to discuss their experiences at MHCC; or having MHCC departmental staff partner with the corresponding high school departments to host talks, events, or visits.

### Using Technology

In addition to an increase of in-person outreach, participants highlighted improving and expanding technological communication to increase engagement. Several parents and community members suggested that increasing use of social media would be a good way to reach young people. Specifically, they suggested creating high-quality posts and short videos highlighting programs and students on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and other major platforms and posting to them multiple times per week.

The MHCC website is seen as a potential place to find information, but one focus group participant expressed her opinion about the site this way: “Being in IT, their website is the most unintuitive website I’ve used in my whole life; I personally want to redesign it.” As researchers, we used the website to learn about programs at the school and also found some presentation of structure to be confusing, information difficult to find or as far as we could tell, entirely missing. In general, participants felt that the school’s technological communications could use improvement.

Some ideas shared by participants were innovative and unique and expressed an overarching sense that the school should think creatively about how to maximize its reach in the community. A few of these ideas included assigning someone to be an Instagram content producer in each department who can make personable posts about projects, initiatives, or classes in their program; several suggested wrapping TriMet buses with MHCC information and posting on billboards—locally and in other areas.

Each of these methods—increasing the school’s presence and visibility in the community, strengthening school partnerships, leveraging technology, and thinking innovatively—could boost MHCC’s message and help excite the community.

### MHCC Messaging

We heard from most business leaders and several members of other focus groups that MHCC lacks a specific coherent message about the school’s identity. One participant articulated this idea clearly: “I feel like I’ve seen a generic thing about MHCC on Facebook, but I don’t feel like I’ve seen any ads about specific programs. Like even if it wasn’t a program that I was interested in, it would be more impressive to see, oh MHCC’s doing this?” Essentially, she expressed that even for those people interested in other topics, by seeing MHCC as innovative and exemplary in specific areas, it may positively shift the perception of the school as a whole.

Beyond discussing how to disseminate information about MHCC, the focus groups discussed what messages about the school would be most compelling for recruitment and community investment. Participants suggested that MHCC:

- maintain a broad spectrum of offerings, but market the strength of specific programs to help create a strong identity;
- market ways that MHCC graduates have improved the local community; and
- communicate the ease of transfer to 4-year schools.

Several respondents also noted that some community members, especially those who are unlikely to attend the school or whose children are grown, may need to hear how

“I feel like I’ve seen a generic thing about MHCC on Facebook, but I don’t feel like I’ve seen any ads about specific programs - like even if it wasn’t a program that I was interested in, it would be more impressive to see, oh MHCC’s doing this?”

### INCREASING COMMUNITY BUY-IN

“They [my older neighbors] wouldn’t care if it helped the person down the street, but if they saw, okay this person down the street is now a nurse who is actually working in a hospital in my neighborhood, that is what is going to impact opinions.”

the school directly contributes to their lives. Some participants suggested that one way to accomplish this is to share examples of graduates who are now working and living in the community. Here is how one respondent described this idea: “They [my older neighbors] wouldn’t care if it helped the person down the street, but if they saw, okay this person down the street is now a nurse who is actually working in a hospital in my neighborhood, that is what is going to impact opinions.”

Though there are many messages that could be effective in engaging prospective students and community members, these messages were the most commonly repeated and emphasized in focus group conversations.

## MHCC Responsiveness

Personal relationships are extremely important for maintaining good bidirectional communication; while partnerships have been established in some instances that foster good communication, participants described how breakdown in communication occurs when there’s staff turnover.

In other instances, we heard that despite repeated attempts to establish partnerships, locate information about MHCC, or offer internship placements or job opportunities for students, MHCC failed to respond. One participant said this about her experience: “They say we want to do internships, but then nobody calls you back.” Small business owners we spoke with noted that when a college fails to respond, despite repeated outreach to the school, they will look elsewhere and, in the past, have done so. We suspect the same would hold for large industries, too.

While business stakeholders want to support the school, strengthen existing partnerships, and develop new ones, many feel the school is closed to their opinions, and business needs. To a large extent, there was a sense that many of the business stakeholders we spoke with across focus groups felt underappreciated.

## Importance and Performance

From a list of survey topics provided to districts residents and a slightly different list focused toward high school parents, we were interested to understand the importance of each topic to each respective group of respondents, and to understand how respondents believe MHCC is performing in each area. The following provides an overview of the methods.

ONE PARTICIPANT SAID  
THIS ABOUT HER  
EXPERIENCE WITH MHCC:

“They say we want to do  
internships, but then  
nobody calls you back.”

## Analysis Description

District residents and high school parents were provided with a list of statements regarding MHCC. For each statement they were asked to rate its importance on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=low importance; 5=high importance), followed by the degree to which they believe MHCC is performing well or otherwise in each area – again on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=very poorly; 5=very well).

The average scores for each statement were mapped onto a scatterplot. The plot was then divided into four areas by crossing the x and y axes at the grand mean. Each area of the scatterplot is labeled to reflect the importance of the respective attributes to the respondents and how well they believe MHCC is doing in those areas as follows:

- Keep up the good work (high priority and performing well)
- Concentrate here (high priority but performing less well)
- Lower priority (not so important and not performing very well)
- Possible overkill (performing very well, but less important)

Readers should understand that the decision of exactly where to cross the axes is relatively arbitrary, but taking the grand mean is the typical way this is done. This approach to understanding priorities and performance relative to one another and to other attributes, developed by Martilla and James (1977),<sup>5</sup> can be a useful way to understand where importance is perceived to be and where increased emphasis should be placed.

NOTE: For each set of questions, the results are presented first in table format, followed by graphical format.

## Importance and Performance: District Residents

Based on the information in Figure 23, residents are strong in their belief that job skills, quality education, and community educational needs are important areas of emphasis for the school, and that MHCC is doing a good job in these areas. This underscores much of what we heard during focus group meetings. As might be expected, using taxpayer money wisely is of high importance, but there is some concern about how well this is being achieved. Similarly, communication about programs and events is perceived by residents to be important but needs more emphasis. Of less importance, according to these results, is offering English as a Second Language (ESL) opportunities; however, this result should be viewed with caution. While 21% of respondents who completed the survey self-identified as a minority, only 6% self-identified as having English as a second language. It is possible, and perhaps likely, that had a greater number of minorities with English as a second language been recruited to complete the survey, this aspect would have held more importance.

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<sup>5</sup> Martilla, J.A. & James, J.C. (1977). Importance-Performance Analysis. *Journal of Marketing*, 41 (1), pp 77-79.

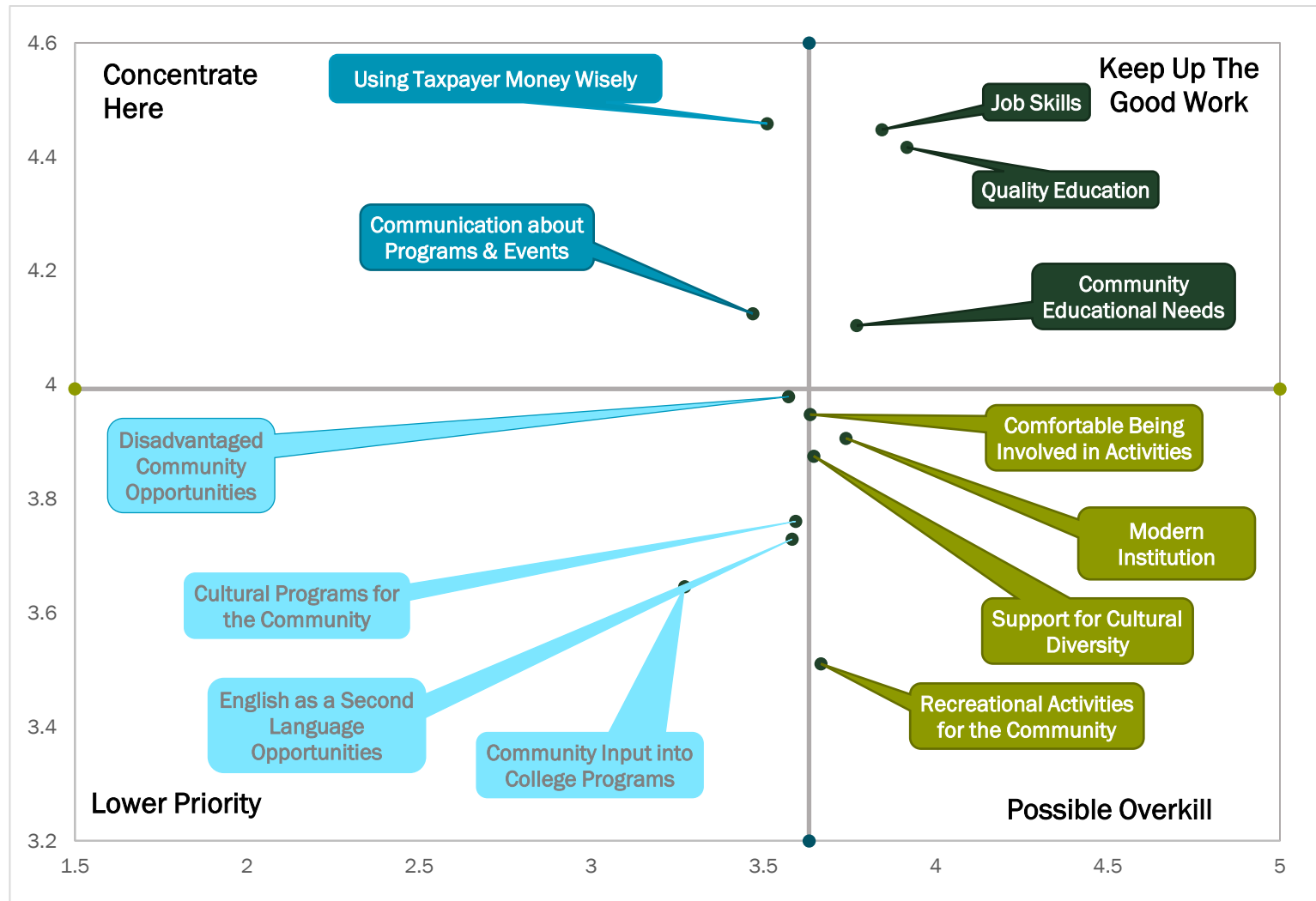
Also of less importance to district residents, together with a perception that MHCC is doing rather poorly in this area, is providing recreational activities and cultural programs for the community; nonetheless, based on focus group information, we think this may be a reflection of residents' lack of awareness of activities and events that occur at the school. As described elsewhere in this report, several focus group attendees describe the planetarium, theater, and pool as providing excellent opportunities for family activities, but also state that there is no advertising of these to the local community. The planetarium in particular was noted for its excellence and for its affordability.

**Table 3** Using taxing payer money wisely was the most important attribute according to district residents.

Question	Importance	Performance
Using taxpayer money wisely	4.46	3.51
Providing quality job skills	4.45	3.84
Providing quality education	4.42	3.92
Easily obtaining information on programs and events	4.13	3.47
Focusing on the educational needs of the community	4.10	3.77
Offering opportunities to disadvantaged community members	3.98	3.57
Feeling comfortable being involved in the opportunities available	3.95	3.64
Being an innovative modern institution for education	3.91	3.74
Supporting the diverse backgrounds and cultures of our community	3.88	3.65
Providing quality cultural programs to the community	3.76	3.59
Offering opportunities to residents who speak English as a second language	3.73	3.58
Residents having input in community college programs	3.65	3.27
Providing recreational activities for the local community	3.51	3.67
Grand Mean	3.99	3.63

Figure 23

District residents believe job skills and a quality education is important and that MHCC is doing well in these areas.



## Importance and Performance: Business Stakeholders

Business stakeholders were only asked about their perceptions of whether “using taxpayer money wisely” is important, and to give their opinions on how well MHCC is doing in this. Of the respondents who answered this question (n=71), 79% believe this is important or very important, scoring an average 4.03 on the 1 to 5 scale. Similar to other residents and parents, the average score reflecting how well MHCC is perceived to be doing in this area is lower, at 3.69.

## Importance and Performance: Parents

Parents’ survey questions were focused around issues we expected to be of central importance to parents. Parents perceive MHCC to be doing particularly well in four areas that are important to them: maintaining small class sizes, being supportive of cultural diversity, offering college credit to high school students, and offering a variety of online classes. In concert with other responses, parents perceive that using taxpayer money wisely is important and that increased emphasis should be focused on this. They’re also concerned that focus be put on programs for low-income students and on the modernization of campus facilities to meet the needs of a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.

Of the 209 parents who provided ethnicity information, 44% self-identified as an ethnic minority and 12% self-identified as having English as a second language, so once again it is a surprise that ESL opportunities and GED offered to those aged 16 and above in both English and Spanish was of lower importance for parents. Also based on this analysis, while MHCC was not perceived as doing well with faculty diversity, this was a lower priority than other features of the college. See page 53 for more about diversity gathered through focus group discussions.

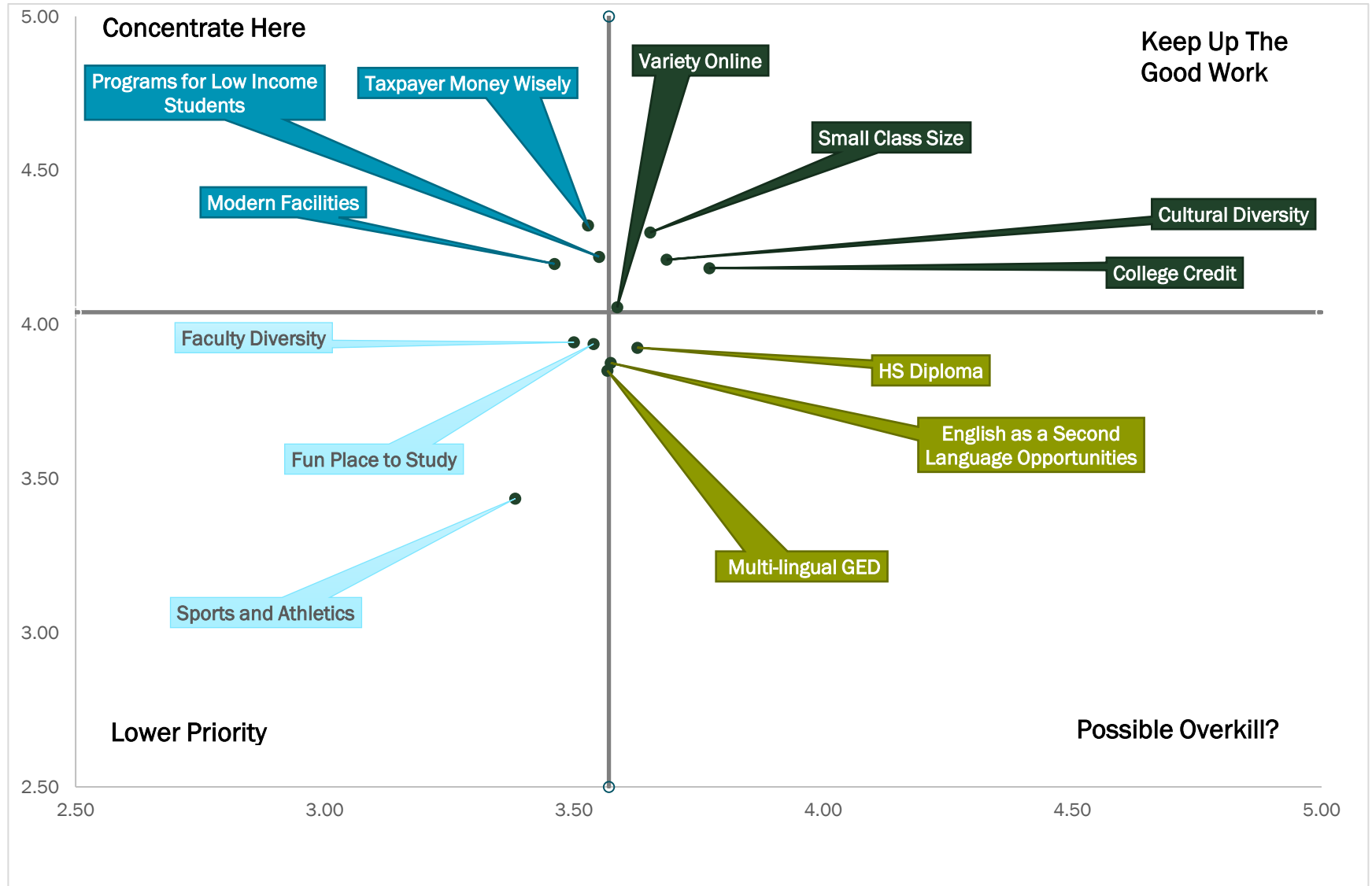
**Table 4** Using taxpayer money wisely held the most importance for parents.

Question	Importance	Performance
Using taxpayer money wisely	4.32	3.53
MHCC maintains small class sizes to support students’ education	4.30	3.65
MHCC has a variety of programs to support low income students	4.22	3.55
MHCC fosters an environment that respects cultural diversity	4.21	3.69
MHCC has modern facilities to meet the educational and training needs of a 21st century workforce	4.20	3.46
High school students are able to earn college credit while still in high school	4.18	3.77
MHCC offers a wide variety of online classes	4.06	3.59
MHCC faculty reflects the diversity of its student body	3.94	3.50
MHCC is a fun place for a young student to study	3.94	3.54
MHCC offers the Adult High School Diploma for students aged 16 and above	3.93	3.63
MHCC offers many opportunities to students who speak English as a second language	3.88	3.57
MHCC offers GED classes in both English and Spanish to students aged 16 and above	3.85	3.57
MHCC is known for its strong sports and athletics programs	3.44	3.38
Grand Mean	4.04	3.57



Figure 24

Parents believe MHCC's emphasis on a variety of online classes, keeping class sizes small, supporting cultural diversity, and offering college credit classes for high school students is important and that they're doing well with this.



## Community Engagement

Campus events and community opportunities arose in conversation during most focus group discussions. Generally, focus group participants felt that MHCC hosts wonderful events for the community, but insufficient advertising, the location of the school, and a failure to capitalize on opportunities for school promotion diminishes their impact.

Participants who had attended MHCC functions were enthusiastic about their quality, but shared a sense that due to a lack of advertising efforts, community members miss out on these opportunities. Many people who enjoyed events at MHCC learned about them through a friend or a direct connection to the school. One participant, previously an employee of an educational nonprofit, learned about the theater performances and movies at the planetarium through her work, but has never seen advertisements about either, despite living in the neighborhood. This sense that MHCC is an undiscovered resource was pervasive. Though word of mouth is an important advertising method, the school could broaden its reach by increasing promotion of these

opportunities and using these as a springboard to promote other aspects of MHCC. Another parent said that her son was involved in track and field and she heard through him about the Highland

Games, which she had loved. Still another discussed an art show that she learned about through a friend. Even if these types of events are being presented by external entities, an opportunity to leverage these to communicate more generally about MHCC to attendees appears to be missed.

The school location compounds problems presented by insufficient advertisement of community opportunities; participants feel that MHCC is a little off the beaten path for many passers-by to be impacted by the MHCC banners bordering the street by the largest campus. One participant shared that for this reason, broadening the reach of fliers, posters, and using partner organizations as hubs for sharing messages about school events and opportunities might be effective.

Ensuring good attendance at events is a valuable goal, and once people are present, the school must do more to promote other school initiatives and programs to attendees. Many focus group participants were surprised that MHCC has not done more to use events as opportunities for promoting MHCC. One participant expressed it this way: “People come for events at the track, at the pool. They aren’t leveraging that opportunity to impress community members or potential students because they

**Overall, participants seemed to agree the MHCC should dramatically increase their use of existing events to promote institution opportunities, classes, and initiatives.**

aren't showcasing themselves." This comment dovetails with those of other participants who visited the school for other events. One participant suggested, "From September through October there are soccer games going all day. For folks who attend, they should put out a sandwich board or other low-key advertisements to publicize the school." Overall, participants seemed to agree the MHCC should dramatically increase their use of existing events to promote institution opportunities, classes, and initiatives.

Beyond the inherent value of serving the community, the school should prioritize advertising and leveraging community events because it is a great way to connect with voters and potential students. One participant put it this way: "You're not going to see anything about the school, know anything about the school, unless you have a reason to go there." In a nutshell, the school as an entity appears to hold a low profile within the community.

### District Residents

We asked district resident survey respondents to tell us how often they attended different events at MHCC over the past year. In the column to your left, you see the proportion of district residents who never attended or occasionally/often attended the different activities over the prior year, broken into four area categories.

We then asked respondents to tell us if their likelihood of attendance would increase if the activities were expanded.

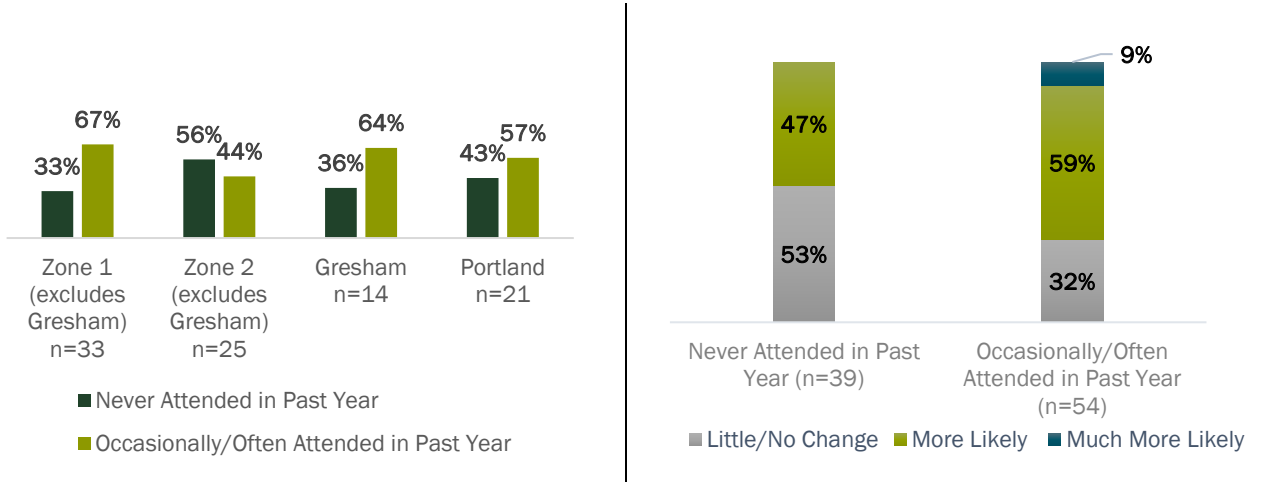
The column to your right shows the aggregated proportion of respondents across the MHCC district who previously had not attended, or who had occasionally or often attended the events over the past year. Bars within the graphs then show whether an expansion of each activity would increase the likelihood of attendance for those who previously had not attended, and for those who had occasionally or often attended each activity.

It may be particularly important to increase the likelihood of attendance by those who previously have never attended these events.

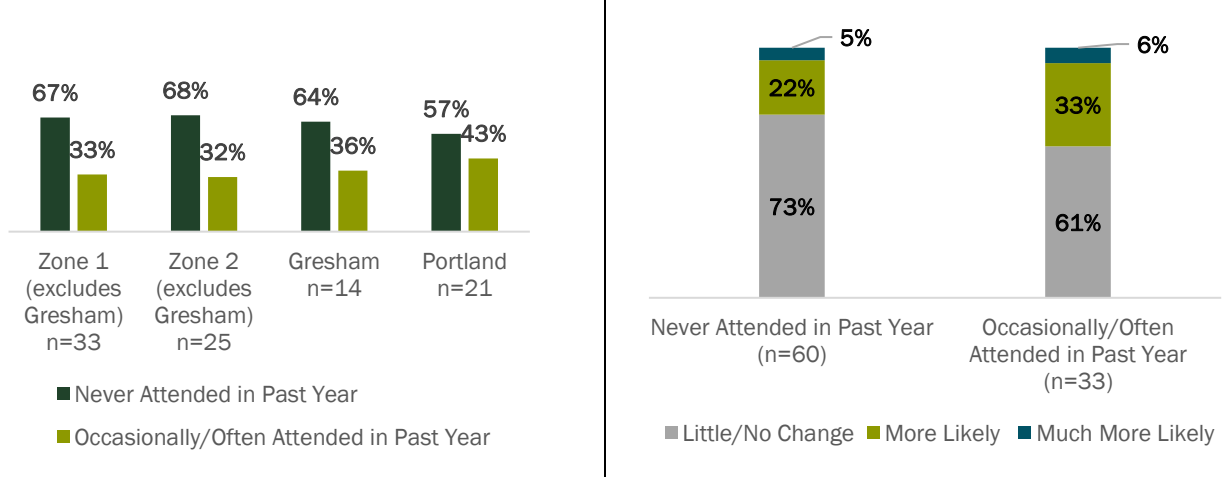
Figure 25

The column to the left shows district residents' current participation in MHCC activities. The column to the right shows the likelihood of residents increasing participation if activities were expanded and they had either never attended in the past year, or had occasionally or often attended in the past year.

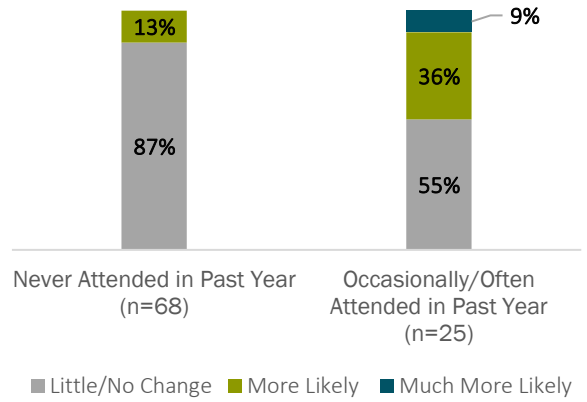
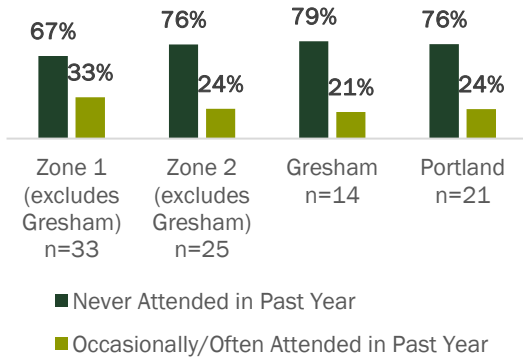
### Special Events



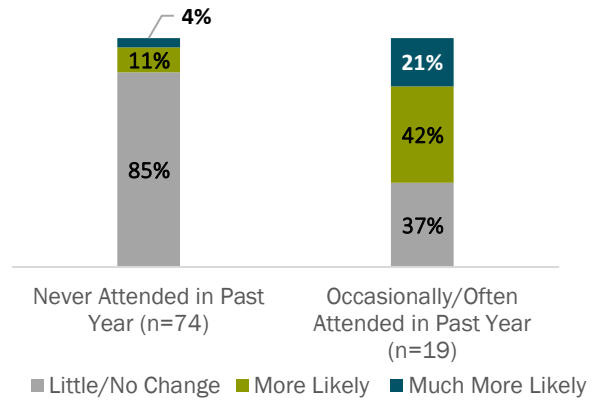
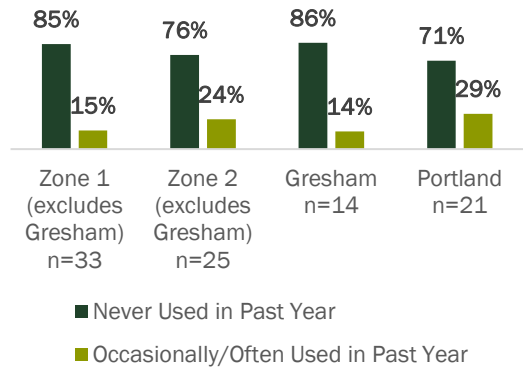
### Recreational Programs



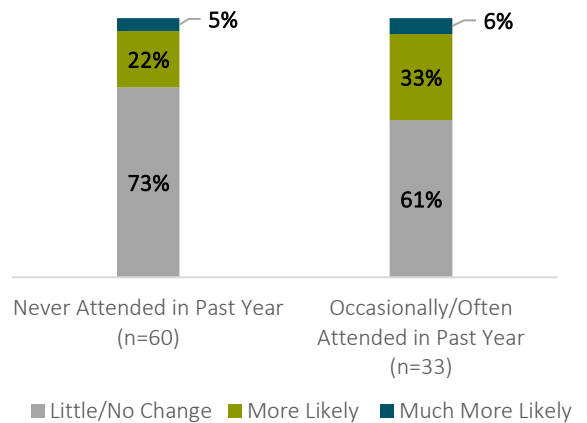
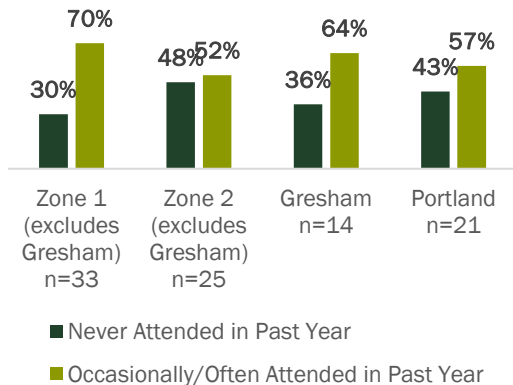
## Sporting Events



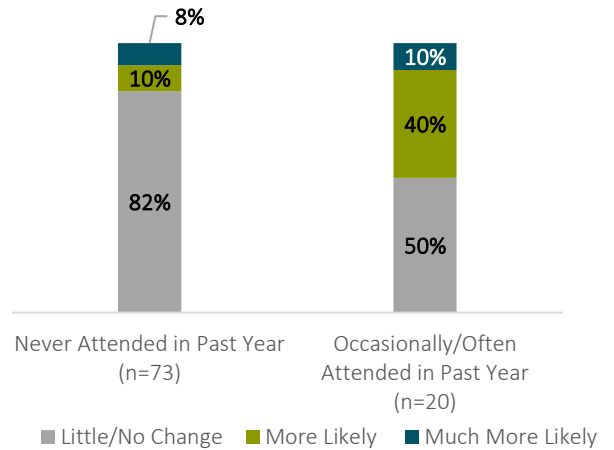
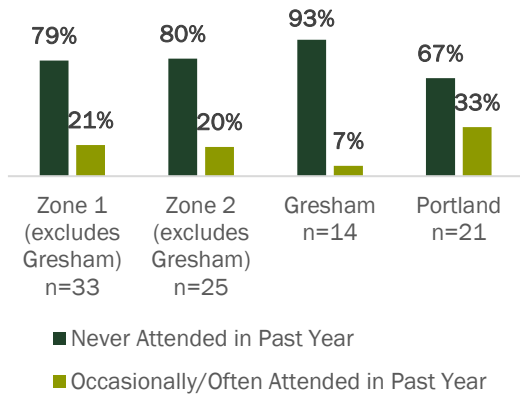
## Career Planning



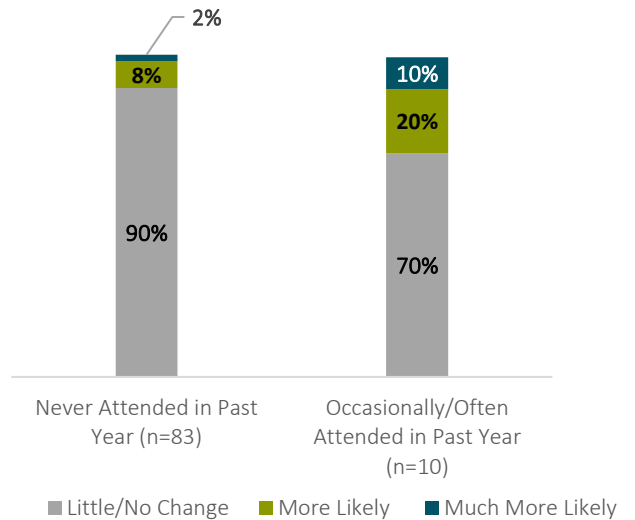
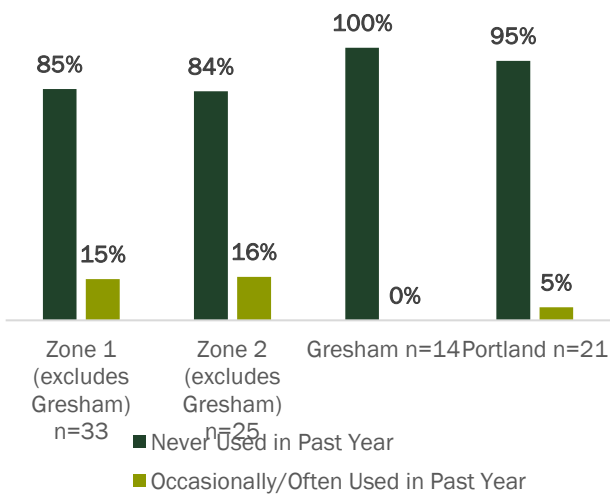
## Farmers Market



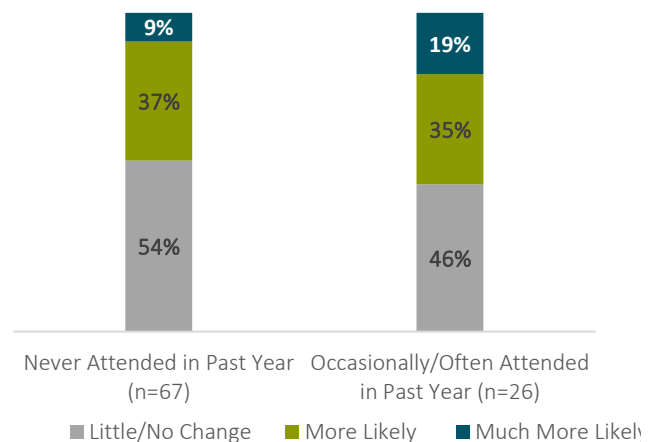
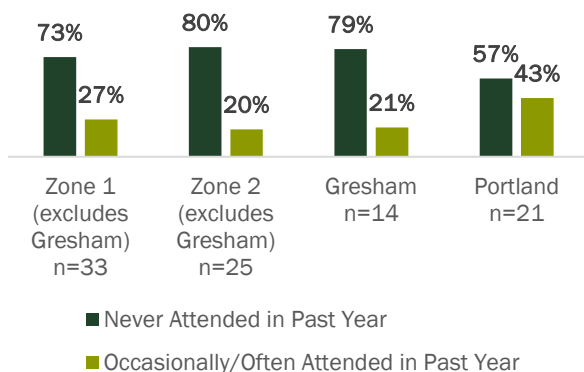
## Health and Wellness Checkups



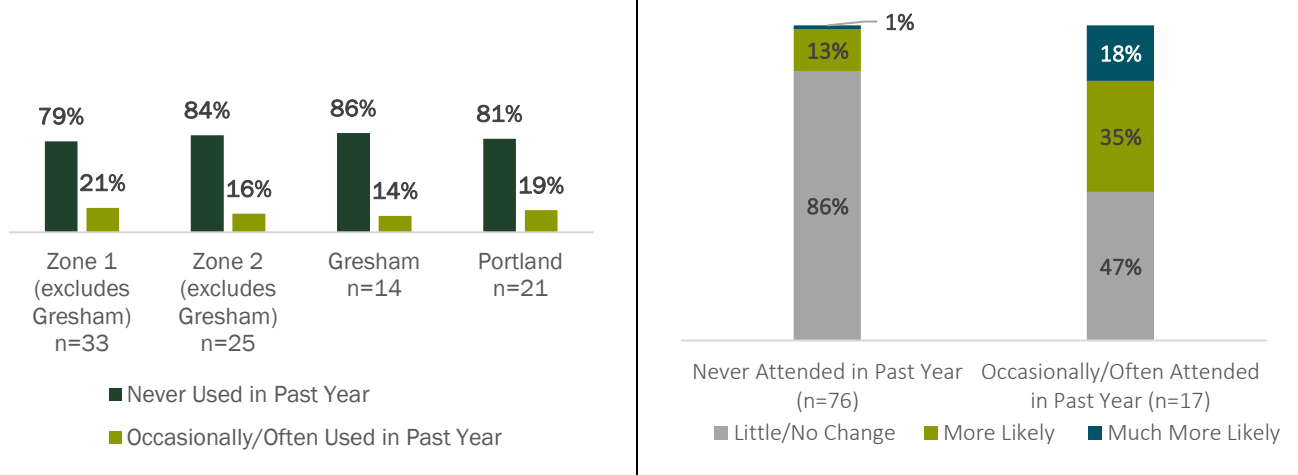
## Facilities and Rentals



## Skills Workshops



## Business Consulting



The results show increases in the likelihood of residents attending MHCC activities and events across all categories if expansions to offerings were made; however, two categories in particular appear to provide an increased opportunity to attract residents who say they never usually attend: special events and skills workshops. For example, as a special event, the popularity of the Strawberry Festival was lauded by several focus group participants who noted how enjoyable this is and who wished for more events similar to this.

It should be also be noted that the farmers markets appear to be particularly well-attended by residents from all areas, and while an expansion of these may not increase the already well-attended markets, they could provide an excellent opportunity for publicizing other aspects of MHCC.

## Business Engagement

We took the same analysis approach to understand the engagement of business stakeholders as we took for the district residents' analysis above.

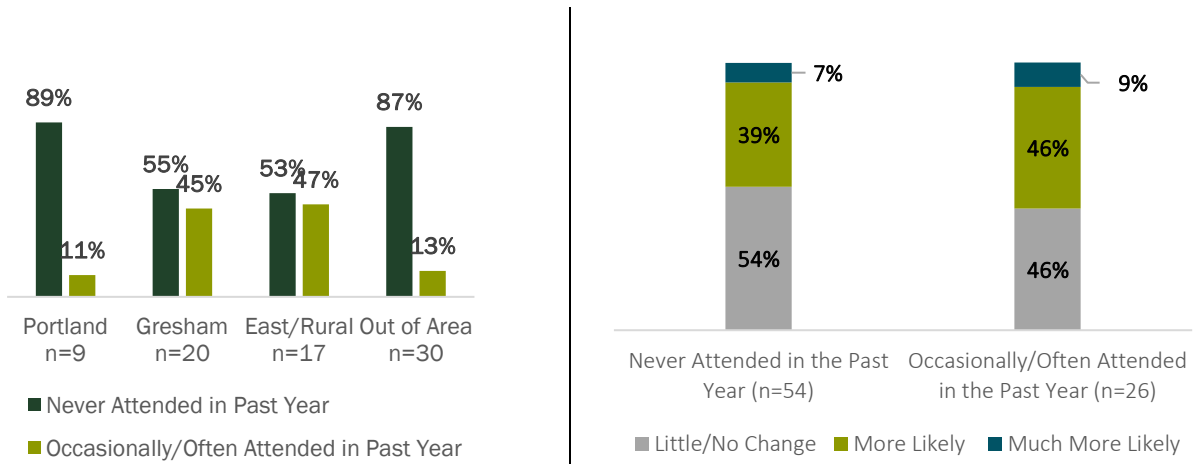
The column to the left provides the proportion of district residents who say they never or occasionally/often attended or recommended the different activities over the previous 12 months. Again, the responses are broken into four areas. As above, bars within the graphs in column to the right show whether an expansion of each activity would increase the likelihood of attendance for those who previously had not attended, and for those who had occasionally or often attended each activity.

Once again, it may be particularly important to increase the likelihood of attendance and recommendations by those who previously have never attended or recommended these business opportunities.

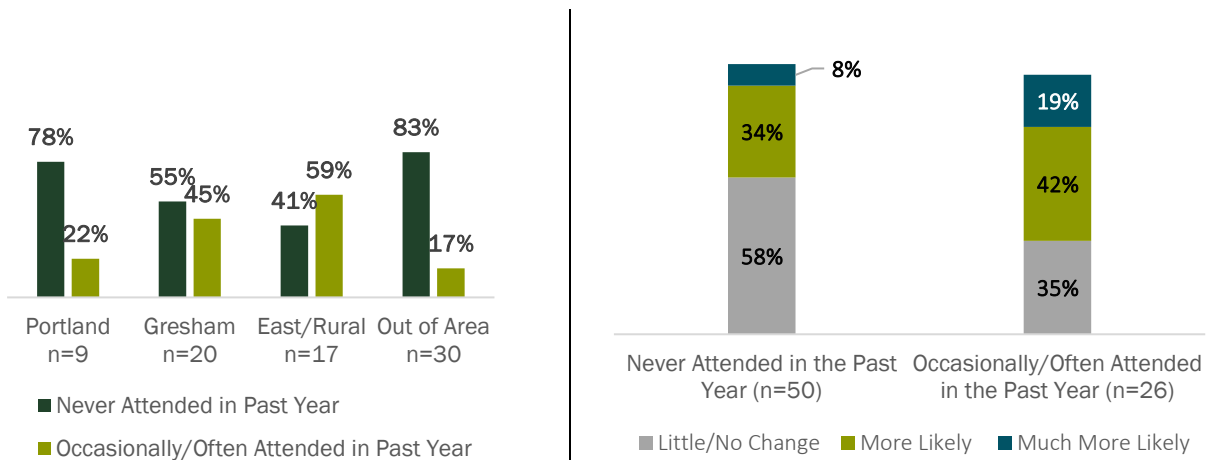
Figure 26

**Business stakeholders' likelihood of increasing attendance or attendance recommendations for activities held at MHCC based on prior attendance over the prior 12 months.**

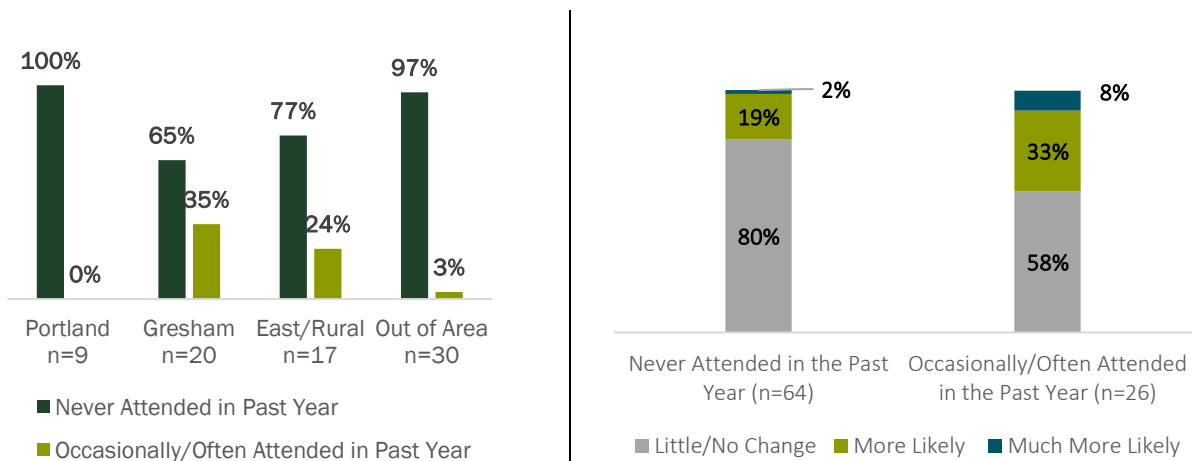
### Skills Workshops



### Customized Training

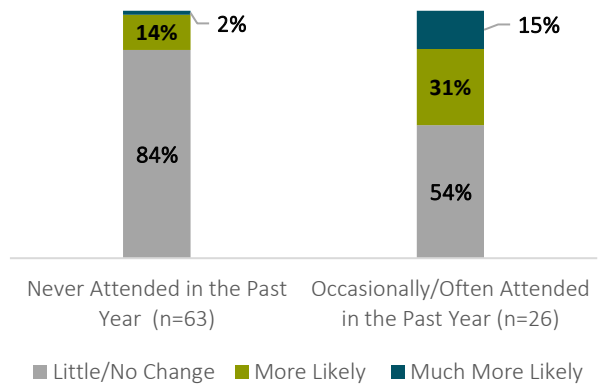
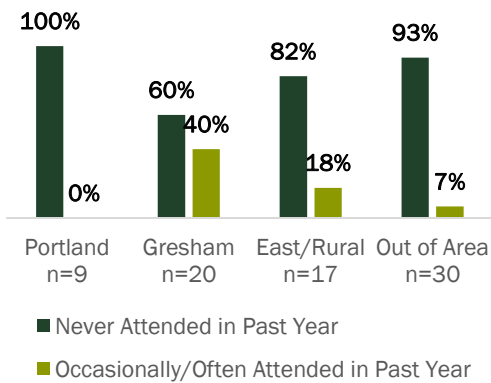


### Business Consulting

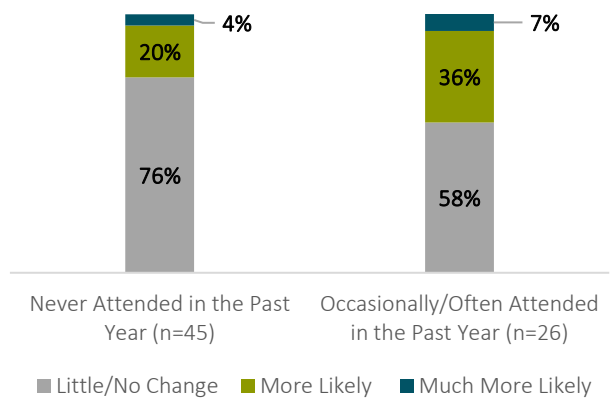
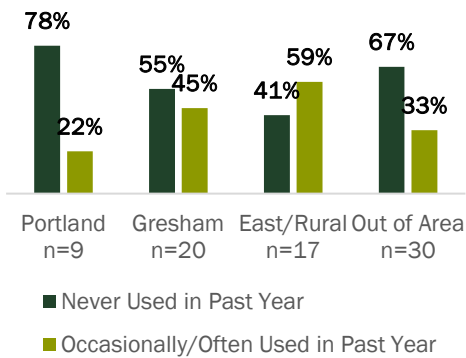




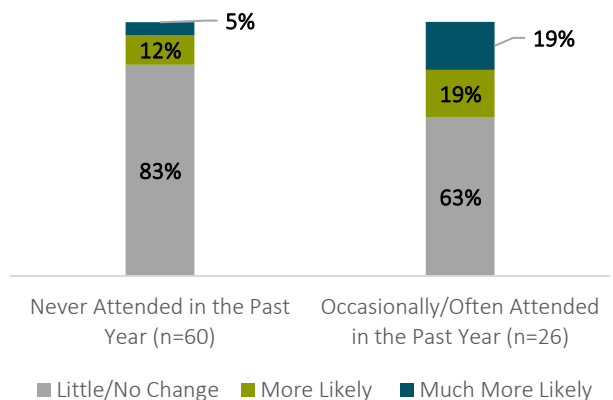
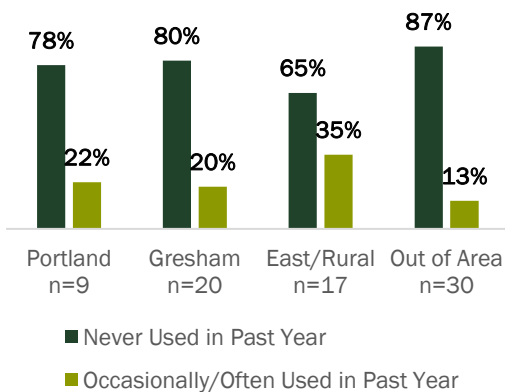
## Computer Consulting



## Career Planning



## ESL VESL Specific to Needs



Career planning and customized training appear to be two well-used MHCC business opportunities based on the limited data available for this analysis. The expansion of skills workshops, similar to the results shown in the residents' survey, and the

expansion of customized training would be two areas that would increase use, particularly for those businesses that are not currently attending or recommending these offerings at MHCC. Business consulting may be another area in which gains could be made with an increase of offerings.

## Diversity

Diversity was discussed less than many other topics in both focus groups and the qualitative survey questions, despite open-ended questions on the survey about MHCC and diversity-specific questions in the focus group. Despite less overall focus on the topic, some group participants did provide recommendations to the school about recruiting diverse students, instructors, and staff; bolstering academic success for minority students, and ensuring access to MHCC programs, degrees, and other opportunities.

### Promoting Academic Success

One focus group participant, who provides support at a local high school and identifies as multiracial, provided several insights and suggestions regarding supporting students of color and students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. She points out that minority and low-income students often receive negative messages throughout their educational career about their ability to learn and succeed academically. She suggests that this can compound challenges that all students face in their transition to college and notes that, without support, early struggles may lead students to cut their education short. She says, “If you don’t have the right supports around you, you can just say, ‘I did finish my associate’s, but I have no desire to continue.’” Essentially, since two years goes by quickly, it is important to make sure students feel engaged and connected by providing good transition support, both into MHCC and on to further education or connections to work opportunities.

In addition to transition support, ensuring that staff and instructors reflect the diversity of the community is important to engaging and supporting minority students. The participant notes that even if staff are not talking about the ethnic, cultural, and racial identity of staff and faculty, students are paying attention, and they engage in a special way with instructors who are open about their shared heritage. She says, “Students of color may struggle with a predominantly white educator experience. Even if the student body is diverse, the professors may not be, and that’s the first thing that students notice when they walk into school.” Essentially, the participant suggests that students who don’t see themselves reflected in their teachers may feel less connected with the material and with the class.

For faculty who don’t come from the same neighborhood or cultural background, trying to understand students’ community and experience can go a long way. The participant states, “Have teachers visit the places that the students might go.” She indicates that familiarity with the neighborhood can increase a sense of connection and understanding.

## Access and Communication

Several focus group participants explored how issues of access can impact who attends programs or enrolls in the school. As described throughout the report, issues of transportation, scheduling, communication, education about financial supports, and other barriers were identified in the course of these discussions.

But, before students ever reach the campus, they need information to decide whether MHCC is right for them. To get this, many students and parents look for their information online. One participant who works with parents said that it would be empowering for parents to be able to see information about the school in their own language. Though translation and updating of the website in multiple languages might be unsustainable, smaller steps could be taken to make MHCC's online presence more welcoming.

One person also mentioned difficulty finding their way around the campus and noted that an equity audit would be beneficial to evaluate how difficult this would be if English was not a first language.

## Recruiting Diverse Staff and Instructors

A foundational step in recruiting diverse, talented staff and instructors would be to review the school's hiring practices. One participant who is part of her company's diversity team suggests, "Look at your job descriptions." Job descriptions may include educational or certification requirements that may not be necessary for performing the position, producing unintended obstacles, or something about the phrasing or language may dissuade diverse applicants from applying. In addition to considering messages to applicants, another respondent encourages the school to embrace the cultural traditions of its community. Specifically, she suggests that the school partner with clubs on campus to host celebrations for cultural holidays throughout the year like Juneteenth, Día de los Muertos, and Tet celebrations, for example. Another participant suggested hosting events that involve foods from different cultures; as an example, Portland State University holds an annual Native American salmon bake led by the United Indian Students in Higher Education. Events like these promote a sense of inclusion for students on campus, as well as for the larger community. This participant went on to remind the school that if you want to attract diverse students and teachers, you must reflect that in your advertising.

## MHCC's Strengths

In the focus groups, participants identified several existing strengths of the school. These include the English Language Learners program, the college staff, and the diversity of the student body. Those focus group participants who were familiar with the school and had English as a second language, or who were immigrants, minorities, or supported minority students, had largely positive experiences with the school. One Latinx school administrator has made an informal network of staff at the college who he contacts directly when he has a minority student interested in attending MHCC. He provides one example of the way this network was able to create a bridge. He says, "One of my students was not documented and I reached out to the community college

to see what they could do...to help him go to college and they did; the student performed really well, then at the end of his career at MHCC, the student was able to receive a full scholarship to PSU.” His is not the only inspiring story of MHCC staff creating opportunities for minority students. Another participant, a Hungarian immigrant who was nervous about her facility with the English language, talked about a professor who showed his belief in her and how his words had stayed with her forever. She says that he told her, “If somebody has a university degree from the Soviet Block, I don’t have any doubt about your ability. If you want it badly, you can do it.”

These strengths could be sustained and enhanced by promoting the success stories, thereby reestablishing that MHCC is a welcoming place to be a person of color, an immigrant, or an English language learner. Additionally, formalizing the practice of reaching out and building relationships with high school administrators, especially those who work with minority students, could facilitate minority students’ smooth transition to college.

## The Bond

During focus group meetings, we explored the topic of an MHCC bond. We wanted to understand individuals’ perspectives regarding why a bond measure had failed in the past and efforts that might increase the likelihood of one passing in the future. This question was explored through focus group meetings rather than survey questions because we expected that this approach would allow for a more contextualized understanding of the issue.

When talking with business owners and business leaders, general community members, and high school parents, several overlapping themes emerged. These included a perceived lack of college involvement and connectedness with the local community; a lack of understanding about how an increase in taxes would benefit community members individually, particularly longstanding residents with no children; the already high tax burden community members carry together with the impoverished situation many community members are living under; and, finally, a lack of understanding of how and where current funding is allocated. One person used the term “lack of transparency.”

Aligned with individuals’ need for more information about current funding allocations was the complaint and perception that seemingly popular and needed classes were being eliminated, while college improvements that were considered by some as unnecessary were being made. This emerged organically as a topic by participants in each of the focus groups conducted. In separate meetings, one person contrasted the cancelling of programs with a \$1 million cost to cover the outdoor pool; another mentioned renovations to administrators’ offices. For some this was confusing, for others frustrating.

Focus group participants also critiqued the lack of early publicity about the previous MHCC bond measure. Several hadn’t heard about an MHCC bond prior to reading

about it in the voting pamphlet. They contrasted this lack of publicity with the immense publicity focused on a local high school whose bond had passed that same year. Others critiqued MHCC for publicizing the bond so late in the year and, therefore, lacking the time to generate support. Several participants suggested that those with younger children might be more likely to vote “yes” to a bond measure because they see the potential benefit to their own children. On the other hand, it was suggested that older community members who no longer have children in their homes were less likely to perceive “a bang for their buck,” particularly when taxes are already so high.

It was also mentioned that if residents believed the funding would be used simply for aesthetics, they would be unlikely to vote “yes.” But if people were told the funding would help with infrastructure and needed updating to support the community, and that this would sustain the college for the foreseeable future, they would be more likely to vote “yes.”

Finally, it was noted that there’s a perception that because MHCC is a 2-year college, students are passing through as they prepare to go on to a 4-year university. After this they tend to work elsewhere, moving out of the local community and, therefore, they are not contributing to the development and sustainability of the community. In light of this, several people suggested that the college should illustrate, through the highlighting of alumni success stories, how MHCC alumni are strengthening and enhancing the local community.

## Study Limitations

An obvious limitation to the study is the limited number of survey respondents. This made it impractical to break survey data into five zones for analysis and determine with great confidence differences between zones. This was particularly difficult with respect to the business stakeholder survey data because close to half of these respondents noted business zip codes that lay outside the MHCC district boundary. Because we contracted with Pamplin Media to send survey recruitment emails to business contacts within the MHCC district, we believe these responses were obtained based on email addresses provided by MHCC as businesses that had attended job fairs and other activities at MHCC. Despite being outside the district, we believe the data they provided adds to the overall perspectives that businesses who have worked with MHCC hold.

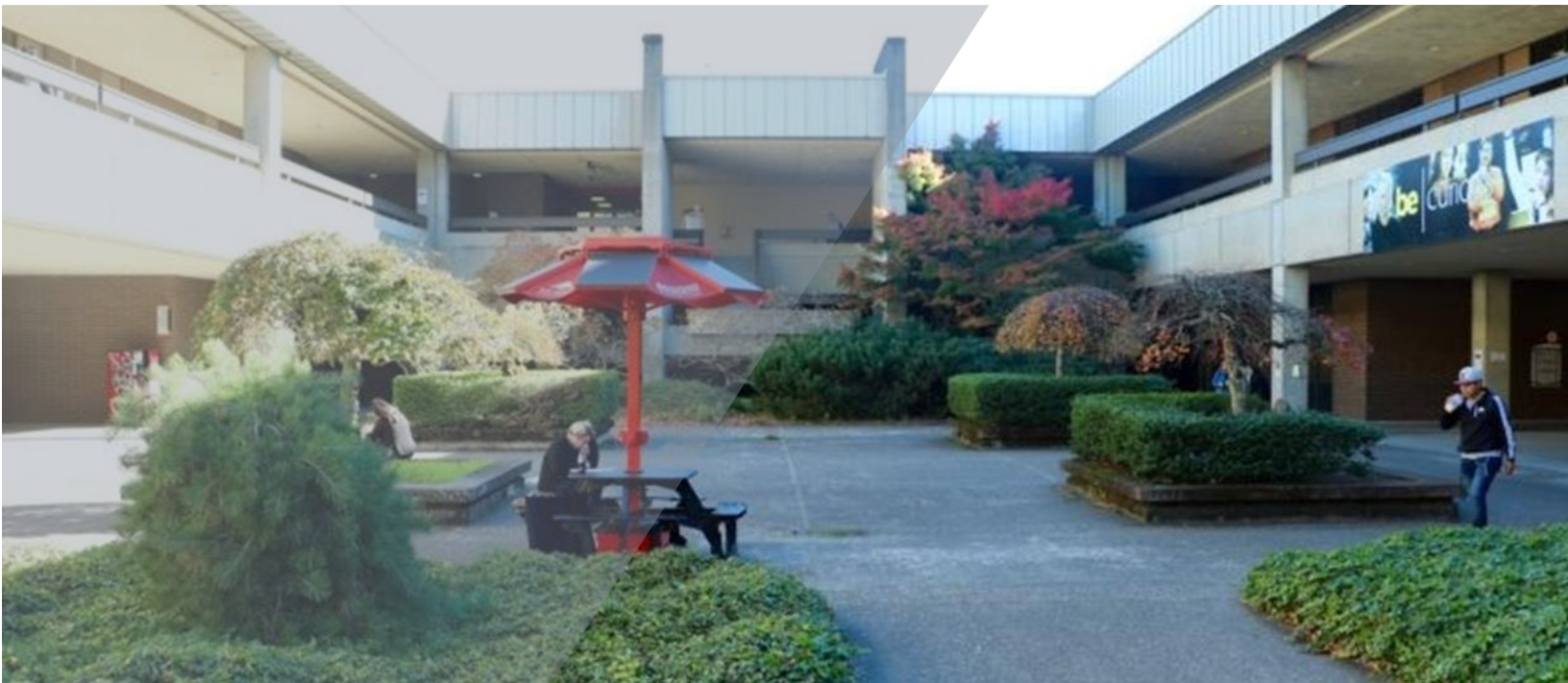
Also a limitation, only three of the nine schools within the MHCC district agreed to disseminate recruitment information about the survey, so comparisons could only be made between the three schools. High school staff from one of the schools described not wanting to overly burden parents who were also being asked to respond to a similar high school survey at the time. Once again, given the pool of potential respondents from the three schools, the response rate was extremely low, despite incentivizing the survey by announcing a drawing to win one of 10 \$100 gift cards.

Obtaining responses to community surveys is notoriously difficult and, with the decline of landline telephone usage, is becoming more and more difficult; even so, we were taken aback by the very few responses we received. One focus group member suggested that to some extent this extreme lack of response may be illustrative of a general lack of community engagement with the school.

Despite the large number of survey respondents who agreed they would be willing to participate in locally held focus group meetings, relatively few attended, despite the fact that we served refreshments, offered an incentive, and sent several reminders. This may have been due to the focus group meetings being held close to the holidays, in addition to the extremely bad weather that swept the area during that period.

Despite being unable to dig deeply into the quantitative data as we would have wished due to the limited response rate, through the triangulation of sources we do believe the recommendations being made are well founded.

# Recommendations



Analyses of the data from the community, business, and parent surveys, as well as narrative data from focus groups, produced seven overarching recommendations for improving the MHCC community image and strengthening partnerships. It is important to note that the recommendations suggested rely on a limited number of survey responses, together with a relatively small number of focus group participants. Nonetheless, we believe these findings are likely to generalize to the larger population and are a valuable window into the desires of MHCC district stakeholders.

## Increase MHCC Visibility at Business and Community Events

The lack of face-to-face visibility in the community was a major concern across focus groups, and many survey respondents were unable to give opinions about the school due to insufficient familiarity with the college's identity and offerings. To more than a few, the college appears distanced and remote from the local community.

**Recommendation: Increase visibility in the community.** MHCC leadership and representatives should routinely attend a cross section of activities in the community. These would include attendance at regularly held meetings such as Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Club, and individual neighborhood association meetings to show MHCC's investment in hearing from, and being part of, these

groups. While it would be preferable for high-level leadership to be seen at the largest of these meetings, other representatives might attend the less formal meetings, such as the neighborhood association meetings.

MHCC staff, together with students, should regularly host a booth at local community events across the district such as farmers markets and street fairs and have a selection of small giveaways and engaging interactive activities to draw in community members, promote the school, and gather feedback from community members.

Participants believe that these activities could expand awareness of, and enrollment in, college courses and programming. Additionally, these steps may improve public perception of MHCC's responsiveness to stakeholder input and deepen the college's connection with the community.

## Increase MHCC Visibility through Campus Events and Expansion of Existing Events

People who visit MHCC or have taken classes there tend to have a positive view of the school, but focus group participants believe MHCC underinvests in promoting events that could draw more people to the campus; moreover, campus events are not leveraged to then showcase MHCC program offerings to those who do attend.

**Recommendation: Leverage and expand campus special events.** Advertise upcoming events more broadly through email blasts, connections with local schools, neighborhood associations, libraries, and electronic noticeboards to increase the number of non-students who learn about MHCC upcoming events such as plays, art shows, planetarium movies, and outdoor summer events.

**Leverage special events** to promote public awareness of MHCC departments, student clubs, and opportunities using sandwich boards, flyers, booths, and tables hosted by staff and students to engage the community and answer questions.

**Expand campus special events;** for example, diversity could be promoted by partnering with campus cultural groups and/or community cultural groups to host celebrations of cultural holidays. Advertise these to the public and have culturally specific foods available. Increase the number of MHCC open houses and highlight specific departments, providing demonstrations and hands-on activities.



## Increase MHCC Presence in Area Schools

Perhaps the strongest opinion emanating from respondents was that Mt. Hood should step up ties with area schools.

**Recommendation: Increase, expand, and sustain local school connections, engaging staff and students from as early as elementary school.** Respondents believe familiarizing young students with MHCC and exposing them to the possibilities there could have long-lasting effects on students' motivation to attend MHCC and parents' understanding of its affordability and financial supports.

Rather than waiting for students to come to MHCC, MHCC should become a routine presence at schools and school events, helping students determine their next steps by introducing them to options and showing them how MHCC can help them reach their goals.

### Recommended Activities

- MHCC students and graduates should visit area schools to describe their work and reasons for choosing their path.
- MHCC instructors should offer to be a class guest lecturer.
- MHCC counselors should attend high school parent/teacher conferences to answer questions and give students the opportunity to take aptitude or interest tests and provide information about relevant programs that could be of interest.
- Familiarize students with trades opportunities using hands-on activities to spark interest in these industries.

## Expand Internet Presence and Use of Other Creative Marketing Techniques

Though interest in online course offerings was low among respondents, many people felt that MHCC should strengthen its online presence and increase its use of online tools and platforms to promote the college. The respondents believed this was an especially vital step if the school hopes to increase enrollment among recent high school graduates.

**Recommendation: MHCC should begin a redesign and usability testing of its website to make it more intuitively navigable.** Core pages should be available at a minimum in Spanish, in addition to the full site being in English. Full use of the MHCC website and Facebook page should be used to highlight interesting projects and events and to explain major decisions at MHCC that affect the community.

## Recommended Activities

- Have daily Facebook postings.
- Implement an active and regularly used Instagram account; some departments may wish to have their own accounts to actively promote their individual activities.
- Use Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn to promote events, projects, and MHCC staff and students.
- Highlight upcoming events on the MHCC website.
- Wrap a TriMet bus to advertise events and promote the college.
- Post promotional materials on billboards.

## Make Marketing More Specific

Although many respondents appreciated the breadth of offerings at MHCC and did not think programs should be cut, people felt that the school lacked a core identity. They also expressed that hearing general statements about the school, or about the broad array of programs at MHCC, was uninspiring. Instead, participants felt that even if a message did not directly target their interests, hearing about a specific innovative program, project, or offering made the advertisement more memorable and compelling—it caught their attention.

**Recommendation: Be specific when speaking about the school; highlight specific academic strengths of the school by identifying the school’s “areas of excellence” and promoting these.** Write short stories about exemplary instructors and students and post these electronically and in hard copy materials. Create 20- to 30-second videos about specific programs and individuals.

## Recommended Topics

- Creative or exemplary programs or projects
- Interesting community partnerships
- MHCC graduates working *locally* in essential service roles, for example, firefighters, police, nurses
- Exemplary teachers with industry experience
- MHCC student success stories
- MHCC students entering the trades and other practical degrees

## Solidify Community Partnerships

While almost 75% of business stakeholders responding to survey questions agreed or strongly agreed that MHCC is a strong partner, fewer (56%) expressed the view that MHCC is doing well to support local businesses. A perceived lack of support was expressed by disgruntled business stakeholders in more than one focus group, together with the sense that they felt underappreciated by MHCC.

Several community and business leaders felt that MHCC staff lack consistency in responding, or responding promptly, to questions, offers, suggestions, or other messages from community members and business stakeholders.

**Recommendation: Establish a community college culture that emphasizes and has processes and procedures in place for communicating effectively with businesses and celebrating business partnerships.** Establish creative, win-win partnerships with community organizations.

### Recommendations for Communication and Celebration

- Be responsive and follow through on commitments (several respondents noted reaching out and never hearing back).
- Develop a standardized plan for maintaining partnerships during staff turnover.
- Explore ways to partner with local companies and approach them with a plan so that businesses, especially small ones, do not have to reach out to the college.
- Celebrate business partnerships. Some community colleges have annual employer partnership awards where business leaders are invited to an event at which awards are given to small, large, and other types of businesses for the support they provide the school through their partnerships. This is something MHCC could consider and may help solidify existing partnerships and encourage new ones.

### Creative Partnerships

- Use student skills to serve the community. This would contribute to MHCC marketing stories and simultaneously contribute to the community. (One example provided was to have cosmetology students going to Boys and Girls Clubs to offer free or reduced-price haircuts. Although this is no longer a possibility, there are other student skills that could serve the community.) These events can be used to demonstrate MHCC engagement in the community and highlight great programs at the same time.

## Implement an “Adulting” (Life and Workplace Skills) Course

Student readiness for employment was a concern among respondents to the parent survey and among those focus group participants who employ recent graduates. These community members felt that students are not prepared for college or employment and wish that the college had a more robust method for responding to this issue.

**Recommendation: In addition to the Wonderlic Soft Skills Training Bootcamp, open to Adult High School Diploma students, and MHCC’s college readiness classes, offer an elective Life and Workplace Skills (Adulting Class) to students.** Goals would be to help students increase their financial security, independence, and success gaining and maintaining employment; provide a better prepared workforce to local businesses; and differentiate Mt. Hood from other local community colleges.

### Example Topics

- Workforce soft skills: interpersonal skills and communication (including phone skills), listening and nonverbal communication, self-management, problem solving, initiative taking, professionalism, teamwork, cultural competency, and critical thinking
- Financial management and taxes
- Making and maintaining healthy friendships and romantic relationships
- Cooking and nutrition
- Health care and insurance
- Sewing
- Basic car maintenance and repair