

Assurance Argument
Carl Sandburg College - Galesburg, IL

Review date: 06-29-2026

Welcome Message for Review Team

June 10th, 2026

Dear Members of the Assurance Argument Review Team,

Welcome to Sandburg and thank you in advance for the work on behalf of the institution to review and comment on our most recent Assurance Argument. We live in a world where significant transformation is happening in higher education, and I hope that you find that our summary of events over the last four years reflects the institution's formative and student-focused approaches to meeting the changing needs of our community and our students.

Sandburg is a greatly changed college now due to the significant improvements to our physical plant at both Galesburg and Carthage sites. Add to this the exciting development of an Ag Tech incubator at our downtown Annex (spring 2027) and the proposed Charger Center, a 60,000+ athletic and convention space (winter 2028), for a total investment in teaching and educational space of almost \$80 million dollars. This has all been done through the blending of funding bonds, community and foundation support, all while retaining our existing tax rate.

The fiscal strength of the college, confirmed by strong Moodys and S&P ratings, has positioned the college to be responsive to the ever-changing environment. We have invested in our faculty and staff professional development, brought salaries into line with state averages, and are tackling rising healthcare costs in collaboration with other regional partners. We retain a strong connection with our bargaining unions to solve these problems together.

Academically, the college has sought new instructional technology, adapted classroom spaces, developed teaching class schedules designed to expedite student progress, and invested heavily in the professional tools and training needed to allow faculty and students to succeed. We continue to support dual credit, new partnerships with transfer institutions in education and engineering, and an innovative strategy to support returning adult students through our Charge Forward program. Recent Lightcast economic data conducted at all community colleges in Illinois demonstrate the dynamic economic impact of the college in our district and region, and the increased community support from key industry partners has underscored the value we bring to workforce development. Sandburg was honored to have been included in the Aspen 2027 Top 200 Schools this year.

Our two Promise programs support our two largest counties' students, and the support of our Sandburg foundation has resulted in 93% of Sandburg students graduating debt free. Sandburg students are heavily engaged in supporting community agencies and outreach in our K-12 system, and volunteerism has been enhanced at the college due to 16 hours per year designated for volunteer activities for all staff. We realize that there is more to do, and we welcome your review and suggestions as we continue to move forward.

Sincerely,

Seamus Reilly, PhD, President.

1 - Mission

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

1.A. Mission Alignment

The institution's educational programs, enrollment profile and scope of operations align with its publicly articulated mission.

Argument

“The mission of Carl Sandburg College is to provide all students with opportunities for success.”

The mission is reviewed every five years as part of the strategic planning process. In 2023, community stakeholders including staff and faculty, students, alumni, board members, business owners, local government, and community members were polled on whether the current mission statement accurately reflects the work of the college.

88.77% of respondents agreed,

7.86% of respondents expressed a negative opinion.

86.52% of respondents indicated that they did not want to modify the mission.

Based on this feedback, the mission was reaffirmed by college stakeholders alongside the creation of the 2024-2029 Strategic Plan.

All feedback on how to improve, reinvent, or realize the current mission was reviewed by administration and discussed by stakeholders in strategic planning forums throughout 2023. The 2024-2029 Strategic Plan was adopted by the Board of Trustees in December 2023.

The college's mission statement, vision statement, and core values are publicly articulated in multiple locations. Sandburg's mission statement appears on the college's website, course catalog, student success guide, employee email signatures, syllabus template, and physically throughout the institution.

The mission and related statements are also shared extensively with faculty and staff during the interview process, at committee, managerial and departmental meetings, and in annual performance reviews. Orientation, student life activities, and regular communication provide ample opportunities for Sandburg's mission to be shared with all students.

Sandburg's academic offerings are consistent with its mission statement in that they are designed to meet the educational and training needs of the district. Sandburg's district stretches across roughly

3,500 square miles, including areas of ten western Illinois counties. Educational offerings include career and technical degree and certificate programs, four transfer track programs (Associate in Arts, Associate in Fine Arts, Associate in General Studies, and Associate in Science degrees), general education courses, developmental education, community education courses, and corporate training opportunities. Carl Sandburg College currently offers 22 associate degree programs and 24 certificate programs. The college also offers substantial noncredit training opportunities through the office of Workforce Development and Community Education (WDCE).

Sandburg's mission was created with an emphasis on serving its entire district, which certainly includes students, but also encompasses any potential students and K-12, community, and workforce partners. Meeting the diverse needs of all constituents is challenging, due to Sandburg's overwhelmingly rural, ten-county-spanning district. The college's scope of credit and noncredit academic offerings is based on district need as communicated by stakeholders, labor market data, and higher education best practices. Data sources that inform these decisions include the annual Perkins Grant report and five-year Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA), advisory committee input, dual credit partner input, and regional labor market data. Course and program success are evaluated each year in annual program assessments. Program alignment with district need is reviewed upon creation of a program in Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) approval and reviewed every five years as part of the program review process. The scope of Sandburg's academic offerings, and the college's process for assessing its offerings, is discussed in further detail in Criteria 3E and 3F.

Sandburg's General Education Outcomes (GEOs) reference the institution's emphasis on the mission by focusing on five key areas determined to support student success. The five GEO's include communication, critical thinking, cultural diversity, information technology, and quantitative skills. These GEO's drive all instruction and form the basis of the syllabus template, which guides all Sandburg course syllabi. Student attainment of general education outcomes is assessed in each course every semester. Comprehensive GEO attainment is assessed at the course, prefix, program, and institutional level each year. This is one piece of Sandburg's assessment process (expanded on in Criterion 3.E) that helps ensure the college is meeting its mission in amplifying student success in academic programs.

Sandburg's mission is the guidepost for all institutional operations. The 2024-2029 Strategic Plan builds from the mission to establish the scope of college offerings and build institutional capacity to provide students with opportunities for success. Each of the college's guiding documents plays a distinct role in operationalizing Sandburg's mission by ensuring that all educational programs, student services, internal operations, continuous improvement efforts, and community-facing services share a collective commitment to student success.

Each strategic plan priority lends itself to Sandburg's mission of student success (directly or indirectly) through teaching and learning, enrollment goals, student support measures, facilities and improvements, community service and engagement, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. The full scope of the strategic plan contributes to institution-wide capacity to enable opportunities for success for each unique student.

In 2024, Sandburg generated an Equity Committee whose focus was to locate student performance, access, and enrollment gaps, and create data-driven goals to reduce these gaps. The result was Sandburg's 2024-2029 Equity Plan, which lays out an analysis of equity gaps among student populations, possible contributing factors to these gaps, action items to reduce gaps, and data-driven goals. Student performance metrics tracking, and the accompanying data-driven action items, ensure that Sandburg is tailoring its mission to each student by addressing specific student needs and removing unique barriers that may reduce student success.

The student performance outcome goals (contained in the Equity Plan) allow leadership, faculty, and staff to assess the institution's progress toward mission-driven goals. In 2026, Sandburg submitted an "Implementation Plan Summary" that analyzes progress toward institutional equity goals.

In addition to the strategic plan, the mission is also supported by Sandburg's vision statement, "Where dreams come to life and lives come to change," and core values, which include excellence, collaboration, integrity, and respect. The core values guide institutional operations, ethical expectations of students and staff, and educational objectives. One example of the integration of core values into instruction and public service is Sandburg's Competency-Based Performance Evaluation. This evaluation, completed annually for all faculty and staff, determines employee performance based on each of the four core values.

The nature of Sandburg's mission and related statements is student-driven and focused on creating educational opportunities based on the diverse needs of Sandburg's expansive district. The mission's emphasis on opportunities for success communicates its broad base of intended constituents by recognizing that diverse populations require varied opportunities and supports to succeed in educational endeavors.

Sandburg's demographic enrollment profile aligns with its mission statement as the diversity of the student body reflects the general population of the college district. According to the 2024 ICCB E1 Report, White students represent the most numerous demographic at 72.99%, followed by Hispanic/Latino students at 12.35%, Black/African American students at 8.11%, and students of two or more races at 4.25%. American Indian/Alaska Native (.06%), Asian (.75%) and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (.06%) students make up small percentages of the comprehensive student body. 1.37% of the student body listed their ethnic identity as unknown or declined to answer.

While this demographic profile reflects that of the larger population, Sandburg is committed to diversifying enrollment and increasing representation through targeted recruitment and student support efforts. This is evidenced by strategic plan priorities A1: "Advance diverse and equitable access to education district-wide," and A4.1: "Expand efforts to attract, support, and empower a diverse student population." Goal 1 of Sandburg's Equity Plan is to increase overall enrollment and that of diverse student populations (including those of diverse racial backgrounds, Pell-eligible students, students with disabilities, "nontraditional" students aged over 24, and students with dependents) by 2029. Sandburg tracks progress toward this goal in its 10-year enrollment trends dashboard, updated each fall according to the ICCB E1 report.

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1.B. Mission and Public Good

The institution's operation of the academic enterprise demonstrates its commitment to serving the public good.

Argument

Access to Education

Carl Sandburg College is a nonprofit public institution that does not seek private investors, contribute to a related or parent organization, or support external interests. Sandburg's funding is almost entirely reliant on district tax dollars, state aid, grants, and tuition. Therefore, the college is accountable to taxpayers, students, and its district. This accountability drives Sandburg's mission, services, and educational programs, and is further demonstrated through the college's commitment to accessible, affordable, and quality higher education.

Strategic plan priority A4.4 communicates Sandburg's commitment to "expand efforts to provide financial supports for students." The financial aid office offers student aid opportunities through payment plans, connections with federal and state resources, and work study programs. The Carl Sandburg College Foundation offers multiple scholarship programs and grants to eligible students. These include the Sampson Promise and Galesburg Promise programs, which act as last-payer grants for students who graduate from eligible school districts. These funds are made possible through generous gifts from Sandburg donors and a portion of City of Galesburg hotel & motel tax revenue and pay up to 64 credits toward a degree for Sandburg students. Dual credit students can also take advantage of financial aid measures, including a reduced tuition rate of 50% for the first six credit hours. Sandburg tracks the status of its student loan borrowers and uses third-party agencies to reach out to students who may be in default on their loans. Through 2026, third-party loan servicers report 0% of Sandburg alums in default on their loans.

Sandburg also pursues several avenues laid out in the 2024-2029 Equity Plan to reduce the cost of student attendance. One example is the reduction of student course fees, supply costs, and licensing exam fees through external grant awards. Funding for these initiatives comes from braiding grant dollars from state awards including the Pipeline for the Advancement of the Healthcare Workforce (PATH) and Innovative Bridge and Transitions (IBT) grants, both awarded to Sandburg by the Illinois Community College Board since 2021. With the help of these awards, hundreds of students in the healthcare and career and technical education fields have received transportation stipends, internship/apprenticeship pay, full coverage of program and course fees, free course supplies, and coverage of licensing examination fees. While tuition and program fees are essential to college operations, Sandburg strives to reach its goal of expanding access to affordable and equitable education for its district residents and the public good.

This core service principle of the mission takes precedence over institutional gain. For example, Sandburg's financial aid office offers FAFSA resources and guidance to any individual, regardless of current or intended enrollment status. This illustrates that Sandburg is dedicated to supporting the community in accessing quality education, even if the individual chooses not to pursue a degree at Sandburg, and places community need over institutional financial benefit. The college also offers a full tuition remission for immediate family members of all faculty and staff, cultivating a culture of learning and enabling upward mobility for hundreds of families. The combined effort of the Sandburg

Foundation, financial aid department, and grant efforts to minimize student costs has led to 93% of Sandburg alums graduating debt-free. According to Sandburg's log of student borrowers, only 7% leave the college with incurred educational debt.

The college also utilizes grants and nonprofit partnerships to support resource rooms/food pantries on both campuses. The resource rooms are operated in partnership with River Bend Food Bank to stock frozen, refrigerated, shelved, and fresh produce items. A community garden located at the Galesburg campus and cultivated by volunteers also provides fresh produce for the Resource Rooms. Sandburg's team works with external funders and the Sandburg Foundation to provide health, hygiene, and baby care items that food banks do not provide. The Galesburg resource room is open to Sandburg students, faculty, and staff and requires a student ID to access. The Carthage resource room is similarly open to Sandburg students and employees but also operates as a food pantry accessible to community members. Resource Room impact through the provision of free nutrition and hygiene products is shared with the Board of Trustees and partner River Bend Food Bank annually.

Sandburg provides a Community Resources guide for students and a public web page designed to connect students and the public to available community resources for a myriad of personal, healthcare, housing, childcare, and educational assistance programs. To connect students with these programs and social services, the college partners with external entities including the local workforce innovation board (WIOA), housing authority, YMCA, and healthcare providers. In 2024, Sandburg worked extensively with its local WIOA office to track gaps in student referrals for WIOA support and hosted several WIOA trainings for college employees to ensure best practice in the student application process. The college also utilized grant funds to create three Transitions Navigator positions, whose main duties include connecting students with external supports and helping them navigate their postsecondary program to reach their education and career goals. The three positions serve different student populations, including a specialized career & technical education (CTE) transitions navigator, an English language learner (ELL) transitions navigator, and a general transitions navigator to support students who are nontraditional, low-income, and students with dependents.

Sandburg's affordable postsecondary programs serve its communities, district, and state by increasing degree attainment rates and contributing to a skilled, credentialed workforce. The college's pathways to degree attainment start with career exploration and college preparedness training for junior high students at career fairs, community education offerings, and campus events. Sandburg graduates become the district's manufacturers, automotive technicians, educators, nurses, dental hygienists, funeral directors, information technologists, business owners, professionals and leaders.

4-Year Update

Since adoption of the 2024-2029 Strategic Plan, Sandburg has made several key operational updates to enable student success, including:

- A restructuring of Carl Sandburg College Foundation scholarships and grant opportunities, which were expanded and refined to align directly with strategic plan priorities. Developments include student success grants, "Life Happens" grants, "Tools of the Trade" CTE program supply scholarships, and Phi Theta Kappa membership scholarships designed to increase access to education and potential for student success;
- Expansion of healthcare options, benefits, and wellness opportunities aimed at increasing employee longevity and thereby safeguarding student access to quality education;
- Provision of TimelyCare mental health and telehealth service for all students and employees, free of charge and available 24/7;

- Creation of mother's rooms on both campuses for working and student mothers;
- Several facilities upgrades to improve accessibility, including automated doors, stair chairs and elevators, and a new sidewalk across the Galesburg campus; and campus expansions including the creation of a Science & Technology Center and upgraded Student Welcome Center;
- Strengthened partnerships with external partners such as Western Illinois Works to streamline student support and community alignment; and
- The creation and expansion of academic pathways designed to connect students with credentials faster, including the Charge Forward program .

Public Service

Commitment to serving the public good is instilled in Sandburg students through coursework and student life. For example, Sandburg's dental hygiene students practice their skills while providing community access to affordable dental care in Sandburg's dental hygiene clinic . Sandburg employees also act as patients for dental hygiene students to reach their clinical hours requirements, and receive free dental cleanings in the process. Sandburg students also showcase their commitment to public service in student life activities. Nursing students serve the public in health fairs and community events by offering health assessments and resources. Automotive students complete systems checks and vehicle repair for public customers for only the at-market cost of parts.

Sandburg's student government and student life organizations work on behalf of the college to serve the public through community works projects. Recent examples include: a "stuff the pantry" drive to raise funds/supplies for local food pantries; students assisting with community firework display setup for the Fourth of July; hosting luncheons for local veterans; volunteering at the community treasures nonprofit thrift shop; and serving as chaperones for local middle school dances. Health professions students have organized fundraising walks for Alzheimer's and suicide awareness. Sandburg's student ambassadors not only serve in peer resource and recruitment roles but also volunteer for community charity events in both the Galesburg and Carthage areas.

Through the office of diversity and inclusion, Sandburg athletics, academic programs, and TRIO/Upward Bound, Sandburg students work hard to bring the core values of excellence, collaboration, integrity, and respect to the community through public works projects. Sandburg is incredibly proud of the work these administrators, faculty, and students do to serve the district and its public. Sandburg's Student Life department provides the students with an app to track their volunteer time and impact on the community. In 2025, Sandburg students provided 71 volunteers at 138 volunteer engagement opportunities. The students served a total of 2,148 community volunteer hours for an economic impact of \$74,741. Areas of outreach included education, civic and community engagement, and health.

Sandburg staff and faculty are encouraged to serve the public through volunteerism. In 2024, the Board and Sandburg Education Association (the college's employee union) amended the professional negotiations agreement to better support employees who wish to volunteer in the community. All full-time Sandburg employees now receive 16 hours of paid volunteer leave to enable participation in volunteer capacities that take place during business hours.

Community Education & Workforce Development

Much of Sandburg's public work is overseen by the workforce development and community education department, which organizes noncredit training opportunities. These include youth

programs, such as athletic summer camps, Kids on Campus summer programs for elementary through junior high students, and an annual “Welcome to the Real World” event that helps prepare hundreds of junior high students for postsecondary enrollment. Sandburg works with the Sandburg Foundation and regional school districts to offer Kids on Campus scholarships that ensure access for district youth regardless of economic status.

The college offers noncredit training courses such as corporate classes in Microsoft QuickBooks and Excel, a food protection manager certificate course, ADA compliance training, and team building. Sandburg allocates awarded external grant dollars to offer many of these noncredit workforce training opportunities free to district businesses. The college further serves business needs by offering targeted employee development classes, including an English Language Acquisition program made specifically for employees of the Carthage region’s largest employer.

The workforce development and community education department also offers career exploration opportunities. Annual career expos, tailored to specific industries, are open not only to high school and Sandburg students, but also to the public. Career expos host approximately 70 employers each spring, some of whom offer on-the-spot interviews to interested attendees. The college has also developed programs in response to the district’s need for trained education professionals. Part of this response includes professional development and networking events, including an “InspirEd” conference for existing and aspiring education professionals in the district.

Sandburg’s commitment to public good extends beyond training for existing businesses to the support of entrepreneurship and the cultivation of startups to stimulate the regional economy. In 2025, Sandburg was awarded one of four statewide Tech Incubator Enhancement grants from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. This \$1.8 million capital award enabled the construction of a tech business incubator called the 518 Collective, which will serve regional entrepreneurs and startup businesses, especially those in the agribusinesses sector. The 518 Collective, so named for Sandburg’s IL community college district 518, will offer collaborative workspace, entrepreneurial trainings, business startup support, networking events, and media development opportunities through the creation of a recording/podcast studio. The 518 Collective showcases Sandburg’s commitment to serving the public good by bolstering regional economic development, fostering community connections, and patronizing innovators in Sandburg’s rural communities.

Sandburg also works with external stakeholders to meet community health needs. The college hosts healthcare providers like Bridgeway Mental Health, Employment, & Family Services and Eagle View Community Health to provide workshops and resources on drug abuse and mental health to students and members of the community.

Arts & Culture

Sandburg is also committed to community service through the provision of arts and music events. The Galesburg campus art gallery features several art exhibits throughout the year, which are open to the public for viewing, including group faculty exhibits, juried student exhibits and the works of area professional artists. The college also produces and hosts productions such as plays and concerts, including free concerts featuring Sandburg’s Community Band.

The college also offers several art-focused student organizations, including Art Club, Drama Club, and Quills Writing Club. These clubs lead artistic events and celebration at Sandburg, including through poetry and writing contests, on-campus murals, art shows, and theater productions. Students can also join the production of Phizzogs Literary Magazine through a for-credit course. Students produce the literary magazine each year showcasing artistic pieces from the Sandburg community.

Sandburg's Regional Impact

In 2026, LightCast published an in-depth study on Sandburg's economic benefit to its district, region, and students. **The study found** that Carl Sandburg College strengthens the public good by contributing \$106.1 million annually to the regional economy and supporting 1,602 jobs, while preparing a skilled workforce that drives long-term economic vitality. Students realize a strong return on investment—earning a 15.9% annual rate of return and \$5.00 in future earnings for every \$1 invested—while taxpayers benefit from \$14.6 million in added tax revenues and public sector savings.

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1.C. Mission and Diversity of Society

The institution provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

Argument

Civic Engagement

Carl Sandburg College integrates opportunities that prepare students for informed citizenship, civic engagement, and multicultural understanding into both curricular and cocurricular activities. Aspects of all five GEOs prepare students for both informed citizenship and workplace success, including the evaluation of ideas and information, demonstration of proficient communication, acknowledgement of cultural diversity, proficiency in information technology, and the use of logical skills and reasoning. GEO 3 specifically aims to ensure that students, “engage others with civility, empathy, honesty, and responsibility, and work well in an environment with a diverse population.”

Students have opportunities to learn, practice, and demonstrate these competencies both in the classroom and through career development opportunities. Sandburg’s for-credit academic internship programs and career development programs are discussed at length in Criterion 3.

Students enjoy several extra-curricular opportunities that integrate both informed citizenship and cultural sharing into their activities. These include multiple student organizations that celebrate diverse voices and offer peer support. Sandburg’s Student Government Association (SGA) not only instills civic priorities into its participants but also promotes academic and social policies that facilitate self-development of all Sandburg students.

Other student organizations promote informed citizenship, including Women of Character (WOC), Sandburg Forum, Phi Theta Kappa, and Men of Distinction (MOD). All these student life groups share goals of strengthening bonds between students, promoting the exchange of ideas, and encouraging leadership. Sandburg is also home to many program-based student organizations founded to offer peer support and prepare students for success in their chosen professions. These include Welding Club, the Sandburg Tech Squad, Sigma Phi Sigma (for mortuary science students), Criminal Justice Club, and Associate Degree Nursing Club.

Sandburg’s student life and professional organizations promote civic engagement through informed citizenship and advocacy. One example is the annual Constitution Day celebration, where student life participants engage students on campus in discussion and hand out free copies of the Constitution. Other student groups engage in civic advocacy for their respective interests and careers, such as nursing students who participate in Nurse Political Action Day in Springfield, IL. At this event, nursing students and professionals from across the state share in educational insights and policy discussions that affect the nursing profession. Similarly, Sandburg’s TRIO students sent representatives to 2025’s TRIO Leadership Summit in Washington DC, where they engaged peers from other institutions and advocated for continued federal funding of TRIO programs.

Diverse & Multi-Cultural Society

Carl Sandburg College positions students to thrive in and contribute to a diverse, multi-cultural, and globally connected society by ensuring the protection of diversity on campus, promoting multicultural engagement activities, and meeting its mission in the context of its constituency.

Sandburg protects diversity by ensuring an environment of inclusivity and respect for all faculty, staff, and students. Board Policy 10: Diversity & Inclusion and Sandburg's Vision for Equity form the basis of Sandburg's approach to education in a multicultural society. The college's policy on diversity and inclusion states:

“Carl Sandburg College is a community of lifelong learners that welcomes, values and respects diversity. The college fosters a climate of mutual respect that celebrates diversity and inclusion by embracing our similarities as well as our differences. The college stands for tolerance, non-discrimination, and cultural sensitivity. We demonstrate this commitment by serving students, faculty, staff and community members with fairness and equality.”

This commitment to diversity, inclusion, and respect is further echoed in the equal opportunity and non-discrimination statement, which appears on the Sandburg website, and in the academic catalog, recruitment brochures, and all publications advertising institutional activities.

Sandburg adheres to all federal and state regulations regarding diversity and equal access to education, and further protects diverse voice through policies and procedures including:

Policy 2.8: Antidiscrimination

Policy 2.15: Accessibility compliance

Policy 2.20: Student and employee harassment & sexual harassment

Policy 2.28: Prohibiting sex discrimination and harassment

Policy 2.30: Title IX

Procedure 2.10.0.1: Discrimination grievance

Policies and procedures that form the basis for diversity, equity, and inclusion at Sandburg are manifested and operationalized by the 2024-2029 Strategic Plan, the office of diversity and inclusion, the 2024-2029 Equity Plan, and the work of the co-chaired Equity Committee, Strategic Plan Priority A1, cements Sandburg's commitment to, “Advance diverse and equitable access to education district wide.” Priority A2 aims to, “Cultivate a culture of inclusivity and belonging that empowers all students to succeed.”

Sandburg's mission of providing all students with opportunities for success requires a focus on equity and the inclusion of a diverse student body. Sandburg's student body is a diverse reflection of its district and the globally connected world. As a public community college, Sandburg is open to all in-district, out of district, out of state, and international students. Based on its location in rural, west-central Illinois, Sandburg's student body is actually more diverse than its district.

To best serve its diverse student body, Sandburg created its 2024-2029 Equity Plan. The plan was constructed in alignment with the state plan “A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth.” To develop the plan, Sandburg put together a diverse panel of staff and faculty tasked with finding equity gaps in student outcomes and interrogating barriers that perpetuate equity gaps. The committee analyzed disaggregated data across specific student performance outcomes and assessed campus climate through surveys and student voice focus groups. The college also worked with the National Diversity Council to host professional development webinars and workshops focused on equity, student voice, and the construction of plan goals and objectives.

The resulting 2024-2029 Equity Plan was completed in May 2024 and evaluated by the Illinois Community College Board and Illinois Board of Higher Education. The plan highlights several equity

gaps for student groups, potential causes of those gaps, activities intended to close those gaps, and benchmark goals for student performance outcomes. Plan results were shared with the Sandburg community via presentations at department, administrative, and faculty meetings.

Equity Plan strategies intended to promote equitable access to education and ensure student success include:

Strategy A

Interrogate gaps within our current data on special populations. Generate options for data collection and student interventions.

Strategy B

Expand access for students and reduce time to degree/certificate completion.

Strategy C

Establish alternative application/enrollment methods for English language learners and create support systems for enrolled students who use English as a secondary language.

Strategy D

Implement methods for student financial support and access to financial aid.

Strategy E

Continue to review institutional policies, procedures, and voice through an equity lens.

These strategies, plus activities, plan goals, and student performance outcomes are overseen and assessed by the faculty co-chaired Equity Committee, which meets monthly. Progress toward student performance outcomes goals set forth in the Equity Plan is tracked in a Student Performance Outcomes Dashboard and an Equity Plan Strategy Tracking Sheet. The dashboard is updated each semester and accessible to Sandburg faculty and staff via the mySandburg online portal, along with the Equity Plan, Strategic Plan, and other institutional data dashboards.

From 2024 – 2026, Sandburg saw an increase in persistence, completion, and student loan repayment rates, but a decrease in retention for the entire student body and among several student populations, including those who are Pell-eligible (low income), over 24 years old (nontraditional), LatinX students, students of two or more races, and those with dependents. The Equity Committee elected to focus efforts on these student populations and continues to work cross-departmentally to implement strategies to support these students. Retention and reducing D, F, and W rates in courses remain the college's top metric priority. In 2026, Sandburg submitted an Implementation Plan Summary that outlines these strategies and planned work toward decreasing equity gaps. These strategies and aligned activities are discussed at length in Criterion 3 in the context of support for student learning and student success outcomes.

Sandburg creates campus environments and student experiences that are diverse, equitable, and inclusive of many cultures. This model ensures the realization of Sandburg's mission of providing all students with opportunities for success, both through the provision of equitable access to education and the presentation of diverse viewpoints that prepare students to transition through postsecondary ed and thrive in the world beyond.

The office of diversity and inclusion oversees several student organizations who serve as a platform for diverse backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives. These include the Black Student Association, Hispanic/Latino Student Association, and MOD/WOC. Together, the student organizations and office of diversity and inclusion host annual campus-wide events that celebrate diversity and foster a culture of respect, including Black History Month and Hispanic/Latino Heritage Month events. Other student

organizations, such as the Gay-Straight Alliance, serve as support groups and offer safe spaces for students to network and prevent biases on campus.

Sandburg also strives to ensure its employment practices reflect its commitment to the inclusion of diverse perspectives. Carl Sandburg College is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer and educator, and complies with all applicable federal, state, and/or local laws prohibiting discrimination. Sandburg has made a concentrated effort to ensure its staff composition reflects the demographic profile of the district. This is reflected in Strategic Plan Objective D3, which aims to strengthen human resource capital through a competitive compensation program, strategies focused on employee retention, and a commitment to inclusivity in hiring. Institutional leadership recognizes that much work is required before Sandburg reaches a fully representative staff population and will continue practicing equitable hiring practices, integrating questions related to diversity, equity, and inclusion into the hiring process, and seeking diverse pools of potential hires.

To promote respect for all human experiences and provide opportunities for all students to succeed, faculty and staff are required to complete a multitude of formal trainings. These include trainings on Title IX and harassment. Specific trainings equip personnel with knowledge that supports a culture of respect for all employees and students.

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Criterion 1 Summary

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

Argument

Since the 2021 comprehensive review, Sandburg has strengthened alignment between its mission and institutional operations through intentional planning, expanded equity efforts, and clearer connection to community needs. The 2023 reaffirmation of mission, followed by the 2024–2029 Strategic Plan and Equity Plan, demonstrates a structured and participatory approach to ensuring that mission guides institutional operations. In addition, the college has enhanced its focus on inclusion and student success by systematically disaggregating student outcomes data and embedding equity goals into planning.

Sandburg has also expanded its commitment to the public good through increased affordability initiatives, including expanding Promise programs, targeted financial supports, and services addressing student basic needs. Workforce and transfer partnerships have also grown, reinforcing mission alignment with regional economic and educational priorities. Sandburg remains committed to student success, and structures its operations around that mission.

Sources

There are no sources.

2 - Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

In fulfilling its mission, the institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

2.A. Integrity

Actions taken by the institution's governing board, administration, faculty and staff demonstrate adherence to established policies and procedures.

Argument

Carl Sandburg College acts with integrity in all aspects of its operations, guided by the mission of providing all students with opportunities for success. This commitment is embedded in the college's four core values —excellence, collaboration, integrity and respect —and is reflected in the consistent, policy-driven actions of its governing board, administration, faculty and staff. The foundation of this ethical culture is the board-determined Sandburg policies and procedures, which govern operations across all areas of the institution.

Sandburg's approach to policy development and maintenance is governed by Board policy 1: Policies and procedures (p.3), which aligns institutional practice with the Illinois Public Community College Act (110 ILCS 805/). This policy establishes clear definitions and a structured process for policy and procedure change. Proposed changes are reviewed by the president's cabinet and legal counsel. New or revised procedures are enacted through the president's approval, while policies are submitted through presidential recommendation and require a formal vote by the board of trustees. The board reviews policies cyclically throughout the year, and votes on any policy updates at each monthly meeting, ensuring oversight and currency in institutional governance. Many policies, procedures, and regulations have been updated or replaced since the comprehensive evaluation in 2021.

Shared governance is a hallmark of Sandburg's policy process. A faculty and staff co-chaired Policy and Procedure Committee reviews existing and proposed policies and procedures, making recommendations to the president's cabinet and board of trustees. Sandburg policies & procedures are organized into three parts:

Part I —board of trustees governance policies

Part II —administrative services policies

Part III – academic services policies

The board of trustees protects integrity through policies, regulations and practices that ensure independence from undue influence. Board policy 2.18: Ethics and gift ban(p.49), requires the college to abide by the State Officials and Employees Ethics Act (5 ILCS 430), banning prohibited political activity and limiting the receipt of gifts. The board encourages any individual who believes the policy has been violated to file a written complaint with the president or the board chair per Regulation 2.19.1(p.178).

Conflict of interest provisions (Policy 11 p.19) further protect institutional integrity by prohibiting board members from participating in decisions that could financially benefit themselves or immediate family members. A concrete example of this policy in action occurred in 2025, when the sitting board chair's spouse was hired for a position at the college. Consistent with policy, the chair abstained from the vote(p.19) when the appointment appeared in the board's monthly personnel report, demonstrating transparent adherence to conflict-of-interest standards.

As a public community college district, Sandburg is accountable to district taxpayers and adheres to state regulations. The college upholds this responsibility through rigorous financial controls. The annual audit process is guided by Policy 2.54 (p.84), which requires the CFO and president to deliver written certification of the completed audit to the board no later than five months after the close of the fiscal year. Consistent unqualified audit results and GFOA Excellence in Financial Reporting Awards reflect sound financial stewardship and adherence to best practices.

The budget development process is collaborative and transparent. Budget managers, administrators and cabinet-level leaders contribute inputs covering employee, program and capital requests, following a clear development timeline (p.18). Prior to adoption, a public hearing on the budget is held each year, with notice published in local newspapers in compliance with the Public Community College Act. Monthly board agendas include financial reports such as the year-to-date revenue/expenditure reports and monthly investment reports. All current and historical budgets from FY2020 through FY2026 are publicly available on the college's Budgets and financial info webpage .

Procurement integrity is maintained through Policy 2.9 (p.42) on campus solicitation, bidding and purchasing, Policy 2.53 (p.83) on purchasing supplies, materials, and equipment, and Policy 2.64 (p.97) on single-source procurement. Consistent with the Illinois Community College Act, the college is required to solicit competitive bids for any operating cost exceeding \$25,000. Board meeting minutes document the review and approval of external bids, providing a transparent public record of purchasing decisions.

Sandburg is committed to equitable and ethical employment practices across all hiring, evaluation and grievance processes. All hiring adheres to Policy 2.8.0 on Anti-discrimination (p.41), which affirms the college's status as an equal-opportunity and affirmative-action employer. Candidate evaluation is supported by structured hiring rubrics (Policy 2.39 -p.69 and Policy 2.4 - p.37) to ensure equity, and open positions are recruited through NEOGOV, a professional applicant tracking system. New employees are supported through a structured onboarding process and internal HR resources on mySandburg. Annual anti-harassment training —delivered through KnowBe4 per —ensures all employees maintain current awareness of federal laws related to discrimination and harassment.

Performance evaluations are conducted consistently per Policy 2.2 and its accompanying procedures (p.35). Evaluations occur after the initial 90-day probationary period upon hiring and annually thereafter, and are explicitly tied to the college's four core values and institutional mission. Faculty evaluations are governed by procedure 2.2.0 (p.226), with additional detail addressed in Criteria 3.A and 3.D.

Title IX compliance is overseen by the vice president of institutional resources, who serves as the college's Title IX coordinator and is supported by deputy coordinators in student development and enrollment management. Title IX compliance includes specialized training for coordinators and administrators in alignment with federal regulatory revisions, and a comprehensive public-facing Title IX webpage that details individual rights, reporting procedures, support contacts and complainant protections.

Employee grievance procedures are addressed under Procedure 2.10.0.1 (p.270). Faculty grievances follow the process outlined in Article 7 of the Professional Negotiations Agreement, which establishes

a Contract Grievance Committee —comprised of two non-bargaining members representing the board and three SEA union members —to review informal and formal grievances, operate within defined timelines, and provide written recommendations to college administration and the board as appropriate. Non-faculty employees follow Procedure 2.3.0.1 (p.256), a written complaint process structured around the chain of command.

Sandburg maintains integrity in responsibility for employee and student safety through policies and procedures to ensure institutional readiness in emergency situations. Policy 2.17 (p.47) governs campus safety and emergency preparedness, while Regulation 2.18.1 (p.175) establishes guidelines for hiring into security-sensitive positions. Procedure 2.25 (p.302) details emergency protocols, including public safety communication and dispatch procedures. Employee preparedness is reinforced through regular training; most recently, an active-shooter training was conducted for all employees, demonstrating the college's ongoing commitment to maintaining a safe campus environment.

Taken together, these policies, procedures and documented practices across governance, finance, employment, student affairs and campus safety demonstrate that Carl Sandburg College's governing board, administration, faculty and staff consistently act in accordance with established standards (internal and legislative) —fulfilling the college's commitment to integrity as a core institutional value.

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2.B. Transparency

The institution presents itself accurately and completely to students and the public with respect to its educational programs and any claims it makes related to the educational experience.

Argument

Carl Sandburg College presents itself clearly and completely to prospective and current students, and the public through a variety of communication and media modes. Student Consumer Information on the college website includes:

- College Navigator that provides comparisons of different colleges' costs;
- Student-centered policies and procedures (p.108), including guidance on student complaints and student records;
- student code of conduct (p.366);
- net price calculator that provides a calculation of student costs;
- annual report on campus safety (in compliance with the Clery Act);
- Equity in Athletics (EADA) data;
- student outcomes, including graduation, retention, and transfer-out rates, and intercollegiate athletic participation, financial support and transfer-out rates.

Sandburg's website also includes vital information for students on:

- Public accreditation status
- Scholarship and additional funding support information
- Title IX complaint process and student resources
- Transfer partnerships and guidelines

In 2024, Sandburg conducted a comprehensive review and update of its website to improve transparency for all stakeholders.

Sandburg maintains transparency on accreditation statuses, including federal, state and third-party accreditors. The accreditation webpage on the college website houses the Higher Learning Commission Mark of Affiliation that is linked to the HLC website where details of the college's accreditation status can be viewed. Additionally, accreditation information and status are displayed for nursing, dental hygiene, medical assisting and mortuary science programs on a landing page, and on each programmatic web page. The accreditation webpage also displays a tracking dashboard for timelines of each accreditation cycle. A concrete example of transparency in accreditation status is the college's record of communication when its mortuary science program was placed on probation by the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE). Sandburg:

- Reported the status immediately to HLC, and provided a comprehensive report with evidence;
- Reported the status to students, prospective students and alumni via a letter;
- Reported the status to the board of trustees, and thereby enclosed the information in the board's public meeting minutes;
- Updated the programmatic and accreditation web page to reflect the status and a timeline for improvement/reinstatement of regular accreditation status.

Happily, based on demonstrated improvements to programmatic assessment (detailed in Criterion 3E) ABFSE reinstated full accreditation to Sandburg's mortuary science program in April 2026. Students, alumni, and the Sandburg community were notified via email, and the program's web page and accreditation tracking documentation was updated accordingly.

This instance, while an opportunity for growth, also served as a reminder of Sandburg's commitment to institutional transparency. Through continuous communication from multiple resources, and clear procedures for information sharing, the college presents itself clearly and accurately to students and the public.

Sandburg includes all per-credit-hour fees within the advertised tuition price, rather than as an additional credit fee. While a few specific programs include additional program costs, these additional fees are communicated transparently and clearly with students. Individual programs and their respective requirements are listed in multiple marketing materials including program web pages, student handbooks (for specific programs) and program brochures. Recently, Sandburg amended its website to include Illinois Career and Technical Education Pathways. These pathways are presented clearly and efficiently online, allowing prospective and current students the ability to map their education with their career goals. All program webpages have admission information, suggested class schedules by semester, accreditation status (where applicable), credit hour requirements, time to completion estimates, career pathways information, and include cost sheets to ensure clear student understandings of commitment, program expectations and learning outcomes.

To maintain consistency, transparency and accuracy, the college's catalog is published through Modern Campus software. In the catalog, program-specific pages are easily navigable and standardized. Students can reach program pages via course search, program pathways or programs (A-Z) navigation. Each program catalog page contains:

- A program description
- Program learning outcomes
- Admissions status (open or selective enrollment)
- Faculty and administrative contacts
- Graduation requirements
- Courses and course descriptions

The college also maintains a syllabus template to ensure all courses include pivotal information for students in both programmatic and institutional respects.

Faculty information and qualifications are listed on the student consumer information page of the

website, in the online directory, and as a directory in the catalog.

Since 2020, Sandburg has expanded its efforts to reach students with important information, including:

- Sandburg alerts system for campus closures, logistics, and safety information;
- The Sandburg Scoop weekly college emails to students, faculty and staff;
- Text message communications to students who opt in (student rights protected by Policy 2.44)(p.74);
- a monthly calendar of events; and
- a newly renovated, fully staffed Welcome Center to offer centralized and walk-in student support.

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2.C. Board Governance

In discharging its fiduciary duties, the institution's governing board is free from undue external influence and empowered to act in the best interests of the institution, including the students it serves.

Argument

The Carl Sandburg College board of trustees is autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution and empowered to steward the mission of providing all students with opportunities for success. The authority of the board of trustees is derived from the Illinois Public Community College Act (110 ILCS 805/), which enumerates the board's powers while also permitting it to exercise all other powers consistent with the Act that are requisite or proper for the maintenance, operation, and development of the college.

The board consists of seven members elected by the district's constituents to serve staggered six-year terms, ensuring continuity of governance across the ten-county District #518 (Fulton, Knox, Hancock, Henderson, Henry, McDonough, Mercer, Schuyler, Stark, and Warren counties). Board officer positions of chair, vice chair, and secretary are elected annually by voting board members. Additionally, a student trustee selected by the Student Government Association and a faculty representative elected by the Faculty Assembly hold one-year, advisory-only, memberships per Procedure 2.0 (p.22).

The board operates as a committee of the whole, meaning board authority is exercised collectively in legally convened sessions rather than by individual members. This principle is codified in Policy 4: Board Officers, Authority & Governing Responsibilities (p.8), which states:

Members of the governing board have authority only when acting as a board in legal sessions. The board is not bound by any action or statements by an individual board member or employee, unless such action or statement is pursuant to specific instruction of the governing board when legally convened. Action of such member(s) must be confirmed by the board.

Independence and Ethics Compliance.

The board ensures independence from undue influence through multiple layers of policy and practice. Board Policy 2.18 (p.49) and Board Policy 2.59 (p.89) require board members and employee budget officers to annually file an Economic Statement of Interest with the Knox County Clerk, held at the Knox County Courthouse in Galesburg, Illinois. Policy 2: Governance (p.6) further codifies that the board will take into consideration staff and faculty consultation in its legally authorized decision-making process, while retaining final authority as the governing body.

All monetary and in-kind gifts to the college are vetted and accepted through the independent Carl Sandburg College Foundation, which has a self-governing board of directors with full authority to accept or reject gifts. This structure ensures that the college governing board is not subject to undue influence from large donations. One board of trustees member serves as a liaison to the Foundation's independent board to ensure communication and compliance across both bodies. A memorandum of understanding between the board of trustees and the foundation's board of directors outlines separate

roles and responsibilities, and details collaborative efforts in fundraising.

Trustee Training and Professional Development

Board members comply with trustee training requirements under Illinois Public Act 99-0692, which requires all community college trustees elected or appointed after January 1, 2017, to complete four hours of training during their first, third, and fifth years in office. Training must be provided by the Illinois Community College Trustees Association (ICCTA) or an ICCB-approved provider. Beyond the statutory minimum, trustees pursue additional development through ICCTA and national trustee associations. Board members attend the national community college legislative summit each spring. The board also retains legal counsel exclusively for the board—independent of college administration—for governance advice and board-only training sessions. Board members report on training experiences (p.5) at each regular board meeting. Training topics include:

- Responsibilities of board members and the role and mission of the community college
- Hiring and evaluating the president
- Evaluating institutional performance and setting the tone for institutional leadership
- Establishing tuition, property tax rates, and institutional budgets
- Approving contracts and expenditures
- Representing the community to the college and the college to the community

Board Retreats

Bi-annual board retreats provide a structured setting for trustees to focus exclusively on major environmental and institutional opportunities and challenges, free from the routine business of regular meetings. Retreat outcomes provide strategic guidance that informs the board's ongoing governance and fiduciary decisions.

Exercise of Fiduciary Powers: Budget and Audit

The primary expression of the board's fiduciary responsibility is its oversight of the college's financial health. The board reviews and adopts the annual operating budget each May, as the fiscal year runs June 1 – July 30. The board reviews the tentative budget earlier in the year, to ensure alignment with institutional resources with the college's strategic priorities. Before officially adopting the budget, the board opens the floor to public review and comment. Monthly financial reports are a standing agenda item at every board meeting, including the Year-to-Date Revenue/Expenditure Report and the Monthly Investment Report, enabling the board to monitor fiscal performance continuously. The board also exercises fiduciary oversight through review and approval of the annual independent audit (p.181), ensuring accountability and compliance with applicable law.

The strategic plan - reviewed and adopted on a five-year cycle, most recently in December 2023 - provides the long-range framework within which annual budgets are constructed. Strategic outcomes are organized around Student Access & Success, Teaching & Learning, Community Alliances, Sustainability & Excellence, and Culture of Continuous Learning & Development. The president's cabinet provides monthly reports to the board aligned with these outcomes. Recent major board actions reflecting fiduciary stewardship include:

- March 26, 2026 (p.412): The board voted to approve a five-year contract with a new learning management system, Canvas, to improve student communication, faculty support and assessment structure.
- Feb. 26, 2026 (p.397): The board passed tuition rates and program/course fees for academic year 2026-2027 to support the FY27 budget.

- Jan. 22, 2026 (p.385): The board empowered the administration to contract with a new course materials vendor to improve student service, access to postsecondary learning materials, flexible pricing and operational efficiency.

- Oct. 21, 2025 (p.179): The board reviewed and confirmed a feasibility study to support the expansion of Associate Degree Nursing program to the Carthage campus.

- Nov. 18, 2025 (p.352): The board reviewed and approved medical insurance offerings for all employees .

- Nov. 18, 2025: The board tentatively approved Tax Year 2025 Levies to support the FY27 budget per the Public Community College Act and Illinois Community College Board approval.

- July 24, 2025 (p.289): The board voted to accept a \$1,811,907 grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to support the construction of an agricultural tech incubator, to be called the 518 Collective.

- June 26, 2025 (p.278): The board adopted the FY2026 institutional budget. The board approves the fiscal year budget each June. - June 2024 (p.131)

- Dec. 21, 2023 (p.64): The board reviewed and adopted the 2024-2029 Strategic Plan.

Open Meetings and Public Accountability

The board conducts all meetings in compliance with the Illinois Open Meetings Act (5 ILCS 120/). Agendas are posted digitally on the college website and physically at the boardroom door no fewer than 48 hours in advance. All agendas, minutes, and supporting materials are publicly accessible through Sandburg’s board docs site (linked on the board’s Sandburg web page) which archives records from 2000 to the present. Meetings are streamed live via Microsoft Teams, and the college distributes monthly meeting recaps to students, faculty, and staff and posts them publicly on the college website. Public comment is facilitated through the Items from the Floor agenda section (p.205), with speakers coordinating through the president’s office.

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2.D. Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression

The institution supports academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of knowledge as integral to high-quality teaching, learning and research.

Argument

Carl Sandburg College is committed to freedom of expression and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning. The board of trustees and college employees fully embrace freedom of expression as documented in Policy 3.4: First Amendment guarantees (p.113), which protects freedom of speech, peaceable assembly, petition and association as well as civil rights accorded to all employees.

Policy 3.18: Student rights and responsibilities (p.127) recognizes that students are citizens as well as members of an academic community. The college recognizes each student's freedoms of speech, assembly, association, the press and the rights of petition and due process, which are guaranteed by the state and federal constitutions. Sandburg extends these rights to all students, regardless of citizenship status, as each enrolled student has the same recognized rights under Policy 3.18. This commitment is underscored by Policy 10: Diversity and inclusion(p.18) and the college's Equity Statement (p.10), adopted in 2024 as part of the Equity Plan.

A few examples of freedom of expression in action at Sandburg include:

- **Student clubs and organizations** (including culturally- and academically-focused) and their **annual cultural sharing events**,
- Creative **publications and productions**, including Phizzogs literary magazine, student art shows, and annual theater performances,
- Open "items from the floor" time at every public board meeting.

Further, as members of an academic community, students have the right and responsibility to participate in the formulation and review of all college regulations and policies that directly affect them. This is evidenced by the student-held board of trustees and faculty representative seats. Student trustees who serve this role represent the interests of the student body. The student trustee selected to represent students on the board of trustees also serves on the Student Government Association and the Illinois Community College Board Student Advisory Committee (ICCB-SAC), meets regularly with the director of student engagement & leadership, and informs board of trustee meeting information with the student body through the Student Trustee Report.

Protection of academic freedom and freedom of expression for union-eligible faculty is further outlined in Article 15, Academic Freedom and Responsibility (p.29) of the Professional Negotiations Agreement between the Sandburg Education Association and the board of trustees. Per this contract, faculty are emboldened to protect and encourage the search for knowledge and its dissemination. Furthermore, "no arbitrary limitations shall be placed on study, investigation, presentation, and interpretation of facts and ideas concerning man, society, the physical and biological world, and other branches of learning. The board recognizes its responsibility to assist faculty members in striving for academic freedom." Further documentation of this commitment includes Policy 3.2: Copyright of materials (p.111), which protects faculty rights to instructional materials they develop. Faculty are granted academic freedom in decision making over course content, instructional resources,

instructional method and learning requirements for students (except where transfer, accreditor or licensing boards require specific learning outcomes).

Sandburg implements protection of freedom of expression through formalized grievance procedures for employees and students. If an individual feels that any of the established protective policies have been violated, grievance procedures are laid out in:

- **Policy 2.36: Student complaints (p.66)**
- **Procedure 3.16.1.1: Student Code of Conduct & disciplinary due process (p.366)**
- **Procedure 2.10.0.1 Discrimination Grievances (p.270)**
- **Policy 2.3 Grievances (p.36)**
- **Procedure 2.3.0.1 Non-faculty Employee Complaint Process (p.256)**
- **Article Seven, Professional Negotiations Agreement (for union-eligible employees) (p.17)**

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2.E. Knowledge Acquisition, Discovery and Application

The institution adheres to policies and procedures that ensure responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge.

Argument

Responsible Acquisition and Ethical Research

Sandburg retains an Institutional Review Board (IRB) (p.131), established by Policy 3.24, whose role is to review all research conducted by faculty, students or other college employees that involves human subjects. The IRB provides the Institutional Review Board Guide regarding the use of human subjects, to assist researchers who submit applications for review. The IRB Guide discusses principles and policies related to the use of human subjects in research. No projects involving human subjects have been conducted by students in the last 10 years, and no large-scale or funded research projects have taken place at Sandburg in the same timeframe.

Sandburg's status as a two-year community college naturally limits the volume of technical research conducted by students and faculty. Students are guided in compliance, ethical behavior and fiscal accountability in basic informational research by their respective instructors. Students learn about research methods and protocols in general and technical education courses, including:

- SSC 120 Statistics for Social Sciences
- ART 111 Art Appreciation
- AOP 291 Professional Internship
- BIO 211 Anatomy & Physiology 1
- BIO 212 Anatomy & Physiology 2
- CRM 211 Criminology
- HIS 105 American History to 1877
- HIS 106 American History from 1877
- MAT 110 General Education Statistics

In these courses, students learn to explain their research including methods used, data derived, data analyzed and conclusions drawn. Other opportunities exist for research in technical programs, such as the Dental Hygiene Table Clinic, where dental hygiene students present their project research to faculty and regional employers.

Carl Sandburg College is committed to assuring that all data it makes public are accurate and complete. This assurance includes, but is not limited to, data reported on student achievement of learning and student persistence, retention and completion. The college ensures the use of timely, accurate, valid and reliable data to act with integrity in its financial, academic, personnel and auxiliary functions. The administration of this commitment is supported by Policy 2.35: Data assurance (p.65) and Procedure 2.35.0.1: Data assurance (p.327). Institutional Effectiveness provides support for on-campus research while Academic Services provides oversight of the process for approval of research using human subjects or protected records. Adherence to Policy 2.35 and Procedure 2.35.0.1 is evidenced by:

- Institutional reporting calendar maintained by Institutional Effectiveness to ensure transparency and timely reporting;
- Storage of collected data in private drives (those that include protected personal information) and in institutional SharePoint site (scrubbed of all protected personal information) —in compliance with Regulation 2.17.1: Data access (p.170).

Academic integrity

Students are offered guidance in the ethical use of research and information resources through a variety of policies and methods. Board policies that guide students include Policy 3.22: Copyright (p.129), which documents the intent of Carl Sandburg College to comply with intellectual property, copyright and fair-use guidelines. Policy 2.16: Technology use and access (p.46), and Policy 3.16: Discipline (p.125), charge the administration with establishing and implementing disciplinary regulations and procedures for student violations of college rules and regulations including plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty.

These policies and practices are available to students in the Student Success Guide and the college catalog. More importantly, an explanation of plagiarism and the discipline associated with the practice of plagiarism are noted on all course syllabi. The library provides a video and an introductory library tutorial, used for student instruction, on the ethical use of research and information resources. The library also provides course-focused presentations on ethical research and academic honesty, and established LibGuides to help guide students in ethical research. The “Ask a Librarian” function gives students an online tool to get ethical research guidance and support, while some faculty liaise with the academic librarian to embed librarian support in heavily research-focused courses. Faculty are trained in plagiarism policies and disciplinary practice in annual faculty workshop sessions. Sandburg’s library protects information and information sharing through its Library Policies Manual. The manual was most recently updated in 2024.

In May 2025, Sandburg’s board adopted a policy on the use of artificial intelligence in college operations. Policy 2.61: Artificial intelligence use (p.91) outlines acceptable and unacceptable uses of AI to ensure ethical, secure and compliant use of AI technologies to advance the college’s mission and enhance student learning. Prohibited uses of AI include its use to bypass academic integrity standards, such as submitting AI-generated work as original student output. AI tools are allowed for student use only as directed or allowed by instructors. The Professional Negotiations Agreement, in conjunction with this policy, prohibits technology-driven tools (such as AI) from replacing faculty positions. Student misuse of AI (as defined by Policy 2.61 and determined further by instructor judgement) is considered academic misconduct and addressed per Procedure 3.16.1.1, like any other instance of academic dishonesty.

Where violation of academic integrity policies are found, Sandburg implements Procedure 3.16.1.1: Student Code of Conduct & disciplinary due process (p.366). These documents can be found in multiple communications including Sandburg policies & procedures, the Student Success Guide, and the section on "What to Include in Your Syllabus" in the Faculty Handbook. The success guide lists multiple policies and procedures including Academic Dishonesty, Computer Acceptable Use Policy, Copyright Infringement Policies and Sanctions, Student Complaint Procedures and Student Conduct.

Regarding the enforcement of academic honesty and integrity policies, confidential data, without citing specific student information, indicated in academic year 25-26 there were 45 cases of academic dishonesty reported through the formal process. 93% of the reported cases were related to the use of AI. The outcomes of each case are specific to the instructor and the assignment. Most of these incidents resulted in a failing grade on the assignment. Three of the cases would have resulted in a failing grade in the course, but the instructor dropped the student at midterm, or the student chose to drop the course themselves. In two cases, the incident resulted in probation in the program, with

dismissal as a next step for another infraction. The data on academic dishonesty is not comprehensive. Some faculty choose not to report it formally and elect to handle it informally. An effort is underway to streamline and centralize the academic dishonesty reporting and adjudication process.

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Criterion 2 - Summary

In fulfilling its mission, the institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

Argument

Since 2021, Sandburg has improved transparency, strengthened governance practices, and enhanced policy-driven decision-making. A key development is a demonstrated commitment to transparency, including timely communication and continuous improvement toward academic freedom and knowledge acquisition.

Board governance has been reinforced through continued trustee development, clear delineation of roles, and consistent adherence to open meeting and fiduciary standards. Institutional policies related to ethics, Title IX, grievance procedures, and academic freedom have been maintained and more consistently implemented across all college locations.

Sandburg has also expanded its approach to responsible knowledge practices, including the implementation of updated academic honesty processes and an institutional response to emerging issues such as artificial intelligence in coursework.

Sources

There are no sources.

3 - Teaching and Learning for Student Success

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness in fulfilling its mission. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

3.A. Educational Programs

The institution maintains learning goals and outcomes that reflect a level of rigor commensurate with college-level work, including by program level and the content of each of its educational programs.

Argument

Learning Goals and Outcomes that Reflect College-Level Rigor

All Sandburg programs and courses utilize General Education Outcomes (GEOs). GEOs are institutional-level learning outcomes embedded at the course level and assessed at the prefix, program, and institutional levels. Upon completion, Sandburg students will demonstrate proficiency in communication, critical thinking, cultural diversity, information technology, and quantitative skills as assessed via institutional GEO rubrics. GEO rubrics are created and approved by faculty assembly. Further information on GEO assessment and continuous improvement is provided in criterion 3.E on assessment of student learning.

Since the last comprehensive visit, Sandburg has worked extensively to update and integrate GEOs into all coursework. GEOs are tied to learning objectives for every course taught at Carl Sandburg College and noted in the approved course briefs and course syllabi. Carl Sandburg College adheres to a standard course brief which includes learning objectives, GEOs, and course outlines for each individual course. Sandburg's institutional effectiveness team keeps a working document of all GEOs mapped to all courses. Since implementing the GEO assessment process in 2023, many of Sandburg's programs have undergone curriculum review and revision to best align courses and GEOs to ensure proper GEO assessment for each course. This work is overseen by a faculty committee, GEOPAC, which includes select faculty members and staff from institutional effectiveness and cocurricular areas.

GEOs serve as program-level outcomes in most transfer courses and prefixes. Select technical and transfer programs (those that culminate in a certificate or associate in applied science degree) have more technical program-level outcomes. In 2025, Sandburg began the process of PLO assessment improvement that began with updating existing and adopting new program-level outcomes for these select programs. Some of these (including Sandburg's nursing, dental hygiene, medical assisting, and mortuary science programs) adopt PLOs as directly dictated by their third-party accreditor. Those who are not third-party accredited began updating PLOs based on course objectives, industry

standards, and advisory committee input. This work was overseen by the outcomes assessment committee (OAC) and the curriculum committee, which are faculty-led and chaired, with assistance from select staff. Sandburg tracked PLO updates and assessment improvement against a four-step checklist, and completed revisions, curriculum committee approvals, and catalog updates in May 2026. More information about this process and the assessment of PLOs is provided in Criterion 3E.

In 2024, Sandburg began its “Quality Matters Initiative,” focused on updating, aligning, and streamlining the structure of all online courses to ensure quality of course delivery across all modalities. Faculty opt into the process in cohorts and are granted paid release time to curriculum map each of their courses. Faculty are also supported with training and mentorship. This process has also created an opportunity to update course learning objectives for rigor and accuracy, and to align those new objectives with GEOs and PLOs. A completed quality matters course map includes updated course objectives, alignment with both GEOs and PLOS, and a map connecting course modules with objectives, activities, and assessments. 27 faculty have undergone quality matters, and 55 courses and 143 sections have been updated and approved by curriculum committee to date. The process not only helps enable alignment and meaningful assessment of course goals, but also demonstrates commitment to continuous updates of each course to ensure academic rigor and accessibility for students.

Ensuring College-Level Academic Rigor

Carl Sandburg College offers undergraduate education at the associate degree level and certificates for liberal arts, sciences, career, technical, and health science fields.

All associate degrees are articulated, and the requirements for said degrees can be found in the Academic Catalog. In addition to course and course sequence information, the catalog provides information regarding working conditions, employment opportunities, accreditation, licensure, department contact, faculty and facility. Information including, but not limited to, application, estimated cost, sample schedule, and student organizations is available on the program pages organized by pathways. When viewing the requirements for an individual program, the prospective student can ascertain requirements of the individual award, both in terms of general descriptions and specific credit hour requirements to earn the award.

In 2024, Sandburg unveiled a state-of-the-art Science and Technology Center. This new building, home to Sandburg’s Health Professions programs, includes classrooms, collaborative spaces, accessible faculty and administration offices, student study spaces, and simulation labs. Industry partners, alumni, faculty, and current students were consulted in the design of these spaces to ensure alignment with industry standards, equipment needs, teaching and learning needs, and the inclusion of impactful student learning environments.

Ensuring Program-level Academic Rigor

Carl Sandburg College continuously updates individual courses and respective programs through curriculum revisions, five-year program review, student performance outcomes tracking, advisory committee input, and annual program assessment practices. These processes ensure that both courses and programs are current and appropriate to student performance. Each department reviews the academic catalog annually to assess course offerings and ensure they are current and relevant prior to publication.

The college utilizes multiple internal steps to ensure the curriculum process is efficient and effective, including Policy 3.3. on Curriculum Development (p.112). This process revolves around the philosophy of shared governance per procedure 2.0 on Faculty Participation in Decision Making (p.22), wherein faculty are consulted in academic-related decision-making through committee placement and service. Curriculum changes and new program proposals are examined by each department, curriculum committee, faculty council, and faculty assembly. The board of trustees provides final approval for all new programs (Policy 3.3).

To inform the curriculum process and sustain academic rigor and relevance, career and technical education degree programs utilize both formal and informal employer advisory group feedback. Advisory committees meet annually and include regional employers, community partners, students, and alumni in technical programs. Advisory committee input was a key part in the development and integration of the Employability Skills Academy into technical programs.

An example of shared governance, the formalized curriculum process, and ensuring academic rigor in action is the process by which Sandburg updated its automotive technology curriculum in 2024. After a faculty-led review of the existing curriculum, and considering advisory committee input, Sandburg added new courses, removed obsolete modules, updated course offering times and modalities, and updated course prerequisites to current industry standards. A rationale and proposed curriculum changes were sent to the faculty-chaired curriculum committee and approved in fall 2024 (p.14). The program changes were approved by the Illinois Community College Board and HLC in Fall 2024. The program update rationale cites academic rigor when it states that the changes “enhance the program’s relevance, equips students with essential skills for the modern automotive industry, and provides them with a competitive edge in the job market.” Sandburg has also recently undergone curriculum updates and expansion in its nursing program, and is currently working to develop curriculum for courses in education, engineering, and English as a second language. All of these changes are informed by community and regional labor market input, and both the education and ESA curriculum processes are supported by external grant funding.

Additionally, Sandburg has submitted each of its Perkins-eligible programs for state approval. This process, directed by the state of Illinois, requires evidence that programs of study are progressive, accessible, incorporate challenging academic and technical content, align with industry needs, and lead to credentials. Sandburg has submitted a total of 11 CTE programs for Perkins approval, of which eight have reached full approval. The Illinois Community College Board is still reviewing the pending three programs but are delayed in approvals across the state due to the volume of approval requests. Perkins-approved programs at Sandburg that meet Perkins program expectations include dental hygiene, medical assisting, mortuary science, radiologic technology, nursing, agriculture, welding, information and communication technology. Programs that have not been granted Perkins approval are not due to lack of quality, but to missing criteria recently created by Perkins legislation, including internship/practicum and student organization requirements that are not essential to programmatic function or student readiness. Sandburg has assessment, accreditation, and advisory input avenues in place to ensure quality across all CTE/HLP programs, Perkins status notwithstanding.

Several degree programs adhere to third-party accreditation standards for individual program(s) and profession(s). Sandburg currently holds accreditation for programs from:

- The Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN)
- Illinois State Board of Nursing, a division of the IL Department of Financial and Professional

Regulation (IDFPR)

- The Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA)
- The Medical Assisting Education Review Board (MAERB) of the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP)
- The American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE)

Each accreditor outlines program outcomes and student performance metrics required to remain accredited. This guidance ensures that students who complete the accredited program can attain licensure and are well prepared to enter the workforce. Sandburg tracks compliance with accrediting bodies in an accreditation timelines dashboard, and each program demonstrates compliance with accreditor standards and programmatic academic rigor in annual reports. The college also employs a director of accreditation to track compliance across all accreditors and alignment with HLC criteria, ICCB standards, and federal regulation.

Technical programs, including those who are not third-party accredited, developed and maintain their curricula against industry standards where possible. Example programs include:

- Welding – Incorporates American Welding Society (AWS) competencies within a variety of course labs.
- Radiologic Technology – American Society of Radiologic Technologists (ASRT), American Registry of Radiologic Technologists Examination (ARRT) and the Joint Review Committee on Education in Radiologic Technology (JRCERT) alignment.
- Automotive – Incorporates Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) competencies within a variety of course labs.

Programs that are not third-party accredited rely heavily on input from local industry partners and advisory committee members to ensure they are relevant to local workforce needs, with applicable industry standards, curriculum, courses and program goals reviewed annually at advisory meetings.

Most health and life science programs require student clinical hours according to industry standards and licensing board requirements. Many technical programs, including welding, automotive, and information technology require job shadowing, apprenticeship, or internship hours. Consistency in student learning and support at clinical sites is monitored through clinical site partnerships, program coordinator student competency evaluations, student surveys, instructor/coordinator support to students during clinicals, and advisory committee input.

Ensuring Course-level Academic Rigor

Sandburg participates in the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI), and all colleges and universities participating in this agreement accept a package of IAI general education courses in lieu of their own comparable lower-division general education requirements. Sandburg has 281 IAI transfer-designed courses according to ICCB, though not all are currently active.

IAI approved courses are reviewed for updates every five years, in which updated syllabi are required for continued approval. Transferrable courses that are not general education courses follow a different process: Form 13. After a transfer course is approved by Faculty Assembly, the Executive Assistant to the VP of Academic Services circulates Form 13s, along with Sandburg's coordinating course brief and syllabus, to six Illinois universities (specifically, Northern Illinois University, Eastern Illinois University, Western Illinois University, Southern Illinois University, Illinois State University,

University of Illinois Champaign/Urbana, and University of Illinois Springfield). It is required that at least three of the universities return the Form 13 demonstrating acceptance of the course for transfer credit before the new course can be submitted to ICCB. The list of partnering institutions, as well as guaranteed transfer institutions and comprehensive transfer guides, is posted publicly to Sandburg's website. Sandburg has additional partnerships with private colleges who do not participate in IAI, like Knox College, where Sandburg courses transfer directly. Sandburg also has a partnership with the Saint Francis Medical Center College of Nursing, which offers five guaranteed seats into their BSN program to qualifying students upon completion of the RN degree at Carl Sandburg College.

In Fall 2018, Sandburg modernized their syllabi with Concourse, an automated syllabus generator, to ensure consistency, efficiency, and ADA compliance. To ensure consistency across modality, program, and instructor, all faculty utilize the syllabus template generated in Concourse.

Sandburg utilizes the Wake Forest Course Workload Estimator, which assists each faculty member in calculating the estimated student time obligation included in the course. This tool, included in each course syllabus, demonstrates that students are expected to spend a minimum of two hours outside of class for every hour in class, and this expectation is incorporated in each course syllabus.

28% of Sandburg students are dual credit. To ensure academic rigor, accessibility, and consistency for dual credit students, dual credit courses follow the same requirements as standard courses. These requirements include maintaining minimum instruction for credit awarded, assurance of qualified faculty requirements, and access to student supports. Course offerings, tuition, student and faculty expectations, and accreditation requirements are all stipulated in dual credit contracts for each site (this includes both additional locations and other regional high schools). Most dual credit classes are taught via online courses, while a smaller percentage of dual credit students attend class at the high schools or on a Sandburg campus. Select high schools offer enough credits on site to be considered additional locations. All additional locations are on file with HLC, as demonstrated with Approval of Additional Locations.

Any course must be approved by the dean or department chair (for transfer programs) before it can be offered as a dual credit course. The instructor must meet the same qualifications as any other instructor of that course or program per Sandburg's qualified faculty procedure (procedure 3.24.0.1 - p.407) and must formally apply and provide a resumé/curriculum vitae and official transcripts for consideration and approval by the dean or department chair. Once the course and the instructor are approved, the instructor must submit a syllabus to the dean or department chair for each semester that the course is offered for dual credit. The syllabus must meet the learning objectives of the course as stated in the approved course outline.

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3.B. Exercise of Intellectual Inquiry

The institution's educational programs engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in practicing modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

Argument

Carl Sandburg College offers programs that engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in mastering modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

Sandburg's general education program is the foundation of all associate degrees awarded. The general education curriculum provides an opportunity for students to acquire some breadth of knowledge, proficiency in skills that are deemed to be commonly shared by those receiving a college education and allows students to gain competence in pursuit of intellectual inquiry and the examination of personal, social, and civic values.

Sandburg is committed to general education and includes appropriate general education coursework in all degrees as well as many of the certificates. These courses are identified in the catalog description as a general education core or an elective course. Some key examples of core general education courses include Sociology 101, Speech 120, Biology 101, and Math 109.

Sandburg's 5 general education outcomes (GEOs) are mapped to all courses. This review rolls up to the program level (certificates, AAS, Associate in Arts, Associate in Fine Arts, Associate in Science). GEO placement in curricula is reviewed regularly within departments, and all changes (additional or removal of GEOs) are sent to curriculum committee. This mapping, coupled with Sandburg's GEO assessment process, gives the college a unique opportunity to demonstrate student proficiency in the student learning components contained in Criterion 3B.

Mapping GEOs to Criterion 3B

GEO	Collect, Analyze, Communicate Info	Modes of Intellectual Inquiry	Creative Work	Adaptable Skills
GEO 1 – Communication	Strong – Logical organization, critical thought, clear style, varied purposes/audiences.	Moderate–Strong – Critical thought, well-articulated positions.	Moderate – “Innovative” thought; sophisticated style and diction.	Moderate – Communication for varied audiences and purposes implies transferability.
GEO 2 – Critical Thinking	Very Strong – Synthesize data, use information critically, justify conclusions.	Very Strong – Evaluate ideas, detect arguments, refute bias.	Moderate – Original reasoning and solutions, though not labeled as “creative.”	Strong – Broad critical thinking and problem solving skills.
GEO 3 – Cultural Diversity	Moderate – Build knowledge of diverse ideas and perspectives; engage others.	Moderate – Inquiry into values, stereotypes, prejudice, and diverse perspectives.	Limited–Moderate – Diversity exposure can support creative expression when structured by assignments.	Very Strong – Work well in environments with a diverse population.
GEO 4 – Information Technology	Very Strong – Evaluate information, credibility, sources; integrate into knowledge base.	Strong – Information literacy and contextual framing of ideas.	Moderate – Tools and technologies enable creation of digital/technical products.	Very Strong – Function in a technological society; use industry-specific technologies.
GEO 5 – Quantitative Skills	Very Strong – Interpret, evaluate, and justify quantitative solutions.	Very Strong – Logical, structured quantitative inquiry and problem solving.	Moderate – Constructing solution strategies and models reflects quantitative creativity.	Strong – Generalizable problem-solving strategies applicable across contexts.

Sandburg’s [FY25 general education attainment data](#) demonstrates that students consistently achieve the core elements of intellectual inquiry expected in Criterion 3.B. The referenced data shows outcomes for all students in all courses assessed in FY25. GEO attainment is measured through instructor-completed rubrics that collect GEO attainment rates for each student based on instructor-

determined class activities.

- Attainment of GEOS that align with communication skills essential for collecting, analyzing, and communicating information indicate broad student capacity:

GEO 1 (communication) attainment rates range from 92–98% across speaking, writing, reading, and listening outcomes.

GEO 2 (critical thinking) attainment rates range from 88 – 89% across critical thinking and problem-solving outcomes.

GEO 5 (quantitative reasoning) outcomes attainment range from 87–88% indicating broad capacity for evaluating ideas, synthesizing data, and developing and justifying conclusions.

- High attainment in GEO 3 (93%) further demonstrates students' ability to engage thoughtfully with diverse perspectives—an essential component of intellectual inquiry and adaptability.

- GEO 4 attainment results (90%) show students can critically assess and use information within technological contexts, reinforcing their readiness for rapidly changing environments.

Collectively, these outcomes provide clear evidence that Sandburg students are developing the communication, analytical, cultural, technological, and adaptability skills the HLC identifies as central to exercising intellectual inquiry.

Student Engagement in Collecting, Analyzing, and Communicating Information & Intellectual Inquiry

Across all program areas, Sandburg courses require students to gather, evaluate, and communicate information as a core academic practice. In the transfer and general education curriculum, COMP 1 and COMP 2 ground students in evidence-based writing and research methodology, while English literature (p.114) and speech (p.124) courses extend these skills through podcasts, video assignments, and oral presentations. Mathematics (p.27) and physical science (p.11) courses engage students directly in the collection and analysis of quantitative and scientific data.

The same emphasis carries through technical, health, and career and technical education programs. Dental hygiene (p.15), nursing, and radiologic technology students routinely collect and interpret patient health data and communicate findings across interdisciplinary care teams. Dental Hygiene students present and defend their instructor-reviewed research each year to peers, faculty, and district professionals at the Dental Hygiene Table Clinic event. Students in CNC, machine welding (p.53), and automotive technology (p.2) analyze diagnostic and technical project information and practice professional communication with clients and supervisors. These applied competencies are further reinforced through the Employability Skills Academy, which addresses customer service, workplace communication, and workforce readiness.

Student Engagement in Creative Work

Creative work is woven throughout Sandburg's curriculum and co-curricular life. Humanities, fine arts, and communication curricula offer a broad array of literature, writing, art, music, and humanities courses in which students produce original work as a central learning outcome. Students in Creative Writing 211 (p.84) and 212 (p.102) develop and refine their craft through sustained writing projects, while ENG 141 (p.73) students produce Phizzogs, the college's literary magazine, managing the full submission, peer review, and publication cycle. Fiction students regularly produce short films using the campus One Button Studio, sharing work for peer critique.

Creative expression is equally present in CTE and health programs. Welding students design and fabricate original sculptures and projects showcased at campus events, and in 2025, Sandburg students earned four medals at the SkillsUSA Illinois Championships, including a gold medal in welding sculpture. Mortuary science students complete and share final restorative arts projects.

Extra-curricular activities in arts and music amplify these opportunities. The Quills Writing Club provides a creative community for student writers and sponsors an annual poetry contest, and the Art Club organizes student-directed exhibitions, fundraisers, and field trips. Sandburg's dedicated creative facilities — including the Makerspace, podcast studio, One Button video studio, Sandburg Theater, and the Lonnie Eugene Stewart Art Gallery — give students the physical infrastructure to create, perform, and exhibit their work. Music programs including choir, vocal and instrumental ensembles, and the Sandburg Community Band extend creative engagement to the broader college and community. The Drama Club produces annual theatrical performances, providing students experience in collaborative creative production.

Student Engagement in Developing Skills Adaptable to Changing Environments

Sandburg prepares students to navigate evolving personal, professional, and civic environments through both its general education curriculum and its applied program offerings. Courses in literature (p.114) build historical perspective and empathy, while COMP 1 and 2 (p.29) require students to research and analyze current events. Social science courses in economics, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and political science develop the analytical frameworks students need to understand and respond to a changing world.

Applied and health programs take adaptability further through direct workforce exposure. Clinical practicum and internship experiences embedded in health and CTE programs require students to exercise critical thinking and professional judgment in real-world settings. Technical and health programs are guided by advisory committees that keep curriculum aligned with evolving industry standards and best practices; select programs are additionally governed by third-party accreditors, and all participate in five-year program reviews and annual curriculum reviews to ensure continued relevance.

Student organizations with leadership, academic, and cultural focuses provide additional context in which students practice flexibility and collaboration. TRIO Student Support Services serves first-generation and low-income students specifically, providing mentorship, direct academic support, and enrichment travel designed to strengthen their capacity to adapt and thrive in postsecondary and professional environments.

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3.C. Sufficiency of Faculty and Staff

The institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services.

Argument

Carl Sandburg College allocates resources and prioritizes institutional practices that enable the hiring and retention of qualified faculty and staff. The 2024 - 2029 Strategic Plan specifically identifies “strengthen human resource capital” as an area of focus for the institution.

Sufficiency of Faculty

Carl Sandburg College employs adequate numbers of both full-time and adjunct faculty per class size and student enrollment faculty trends. The ratio of students to faculty is 15:1 as reported in the 2025 IPEDS Fall Enrollment Survey.

Sandburg ensures a sufficiency of qualified faculty to teach scheduled classes each semester by:

- Basing course times and schedules on student enrollment and course registration, tracked by week in ongoing enrollment dashboards and a weekly “Permission to Register” waitlisted and scheduled student roster tied to courses.
- Consulting existing faculty in the allocation of teaching assignments relative to subject matter and time allotments, per the faculty contract.
- Basing class size and teaching assignments on teaching load. Per the professional negotiations agreement, load is not to exceed 30 semester hours per academic year (15 per semester). Faculty whose semester hours equate to fewer than 15 can fill credit hours with release time or other assignments (faculty contract section 14.3 - p.27).
- Considering overload classes, for which full-time faculty have right of first refusal. Opportunities are given on a rotational basis with respect to seniority. Load equated hour limits per semester/academic year are laid out in the faculty contract (p.28).
- Reviewing course and program viability as part of the budget process (p.18) each spring, considering cost revenue reports for each prefix, enrollment and tuition projections, and programmatic need (reviewed in department meetings, advisory committees, and five-year program review). Sandburg also evaluates position openings based on retirement or staffing changes of tenured faculty during the budget process to post job openings or reallocate funds to other teaching positions as necessary. Based on this data, Sandburg budgets accordingly for new faculty positions and posts position openings through the college’s human resource job posting channels.

Carl Sandburg College follows the HLC assumed practice requirements for qualified instructors through Policy 2.39 on Qualified Employees (p.69) and Procedure 3.24.0.1 on Qualified Faculty

(p.407). For those teaching in our general education courses, qualified faculty must possess a minimum of a master's degree in the discipline they wish to teach. If they do not have a Master's in the discipline, then the qualified faculty must hold a master's degree in another discipline and eighteen graduate credit hours in the discipline they wish to teach. For those teaching career, technical, or health professions, qualified faculty must possess a minimum of 2,000 hours of on-the-job work experience and field specific credentials when applicable. All dual credit faculty follow the same process and require the same credentials. It is important to note that some programs, like Nursing, require master's -prepared faculty. Sandburg requires that faculty have one level above the credential they teach if appropriate.

The college maintains a Qualified Faculty Rubric on faculty. The rubric documents qualifications of education, teaching experience, industry credentials, receipt of official transcripts for the highest degree and/or certificates earned, and verification from employers of the 2,000 work hours completed.

In addition, all faculty are provided with job descriptions that list the minimum degree required and/or preferred degree. In the case of the CTE faculty job descriptions, the 2,000 hours in the skill or trade along with other required certificates or licenses are posted.

Sandburg's full-time faculty follow the policy, procedure, and regulation manual in conjunction with the professional negotiations agreement (faculty contract). These expectations outline faculty responsibilities for teaching, professional development, involvement in their academic programs, and involvement at Sandburg and in the community. Adjunct faculty refer to the Faculty Handbook for guidance on faculty expectations and how to administer their courses. Policy 2 on Governance (p.6) establishes Sandburg's operationalization of shared governance, while Procedure 2.4.0 provides detail on expected duties and responsibilities of full-time faculty.

Examples of the operationalization of shared governance include:

- Faculty assembly, which meets monthly to vote on matters concerning curriculum, subject matter, faculty evaluation, academic standards and student affairs (per Policy 2).
- Committee structures and responsibilities, and an elected faculty council.
- An elected (non-voting) faculty representative(p.22) on the Board of Trustees.

Carl Sandburg College evaluates its faculty regularly in several ways in addition to the established tenure process: Policy 2.2 (p.35) and Procedure 2.2.0(p.226). The contract also stipulates regulations for performance evaluation of faculty (Article 20.1 - p.38).

Student evaluations occur consistently at Sandburg. All faculty members are evaluated in each course each semester. Instructors receive comprehensive and aggregate data analysis from evaluations after the conclusion of the semester so they can assess and improve their courses. Evaluation results for adjunct faculty also go to deans or department chairs and VP of academic service, while non-tenured faculty evaluation results also go to the tenure committee. During the tenure process, faculty might choose to discuss outcomes per student evaluations. Tenured faculty's evaluations only go to the faculty member.

Classroom observations are uniform for all faculty. For non-tenured full-time faculty in the tenure process, the tenure committee is responsible for distributing blank forms, collecting completed evaluations, distributing copies of the assessments, and serving as the depository of all the evaluation documents. For tenured faculty and adjunct faculty, deans and department chairs are responsible for this process. The purpose of classroom observations are to improve instruction, support individual faculty in continuous improvement, to make a basis for year-end recommendation for rehiring, and to provide information for making a tenure recommendation/decision.

Full-time faculty members hold a minimum of four office hours per week in accordance with the faculty contract (p.27). These requirements ensure availability of faculty to students and encompass a minimum of two working days. Furthermore, all full-time faculty members are on Sandburg's campus for a minimum of 20 hours per week, including class time, posted office hours, and general preparation time. Overload hours are excluded from this on-campus time commitment.

Adjunct faculty are contractually obligated to be accessible for student inquiry and provide students with accurate and timely feedback.

Sufficiency of Staff

Sandburg strives for well-qualified staff (p.69) who understand the needs of our students. All staff members have job descriptions that detail the job responsibilities and minimal skills, experience, and educational background required or preferred for new hires. Many of Sandburg's interview questions focus on determining if the perspective employee has experience working with community college students, can communicate with people from various backgrounds, can understand the challenges community college students face, and can be an advocate for students traditionally under-represented in higher education. Sandburg determines position classification based on factors like current similar positions and/or required education as determined by the industry ICCB regulations (where applicable).

Sandburg's ensures the sufficiency of staff to support student needs through the following activities:

- Consideration of student need and resource allocation in the development of new staff positions through the annual budget development process;
- The use of an organizational chart to denote roles, responsibilities, and any service gaps that might exist;
- The use of external grant funds to pilot new student support positions and project-based personnel. Examples include the creation of transitions navigators to work directly with underserved student populations, a Perkins coordinator to ensure quality of Perkins programs and grant compliance, and a trades program advocate to work with students in trade pathways.
- Structure for annual performance evaluations, conducted each December, and aligned with institutional mission and core values. Employees additionally undergo this evaluation upon the end of a three-month "probationary period" after initial hire, or upon the close of a "performance improvement plan" for any disciplinary action. Regular staff evaluation demonstrates Sandburg's commitment to continuous improvement and sufficiency of staff capability to meet student needs.

Sandburg offers robust and intentional professional development opportunities to ensure growth and

personnel qualifications to serve students. Professional development offerings include:

- An immersive Leadership Academy open to all Sandburg employees (through application) each spring. The Leadership Academy offers participating personnel an opportunity to engage with college leadership, master collaborative and problem-solving strategies, understand their work styles and leadership potential, and contribute ideas to Sandburg’s strategic priorities .
- Free Mental Health First Aid training.
- Workplace skill and personal development opportunities through Sandburg’s professional development team and workforce development & community education team.
- Resource allocation to send Sandburg employees to professional conferences, regional meetings, and learning expos.

Investing in Human Resource Capital for Quality and Sustainability of Programs

As an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer and educator that complies with all applicable federal, state, and/or local laws prohibiting discrimination (Policy 2.8 - p.41), Sandburg strives to “cultivate a commitment to inclusivity in hiring.” This is further outlined in 2024 – 2029 Strategic Plan, outcome D3: strengthen human resource capital. Sandburg contracts with NEOGov and ADP to post position openings and canvas diverse applicants.

To attract and retain a qualified workforce, Sandburg offers competitive compensation rates (p.60) and comprehensive benefits packages . Sandburg pays faculty more per overload credit hour than the state average rate and keeps faculty average compensation well in range of peer institutions. As a result of Sandburg’s employment policies, benefits, and pay scales, Carl Sandburg College faculty and staff have strong continuity as seen through longevity with the institution. Sandburg recognizes faculty and staff commitment to Sandburg through annual service awards recognizing years of service and annual elected faculty/staff of the year awards.

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3.D. Support for Student Learning and Resources for Teaching

The institution provides student support services that address the needs of its student populations, as well as the teaching resources and infrastructure necessary for student success.

Argument

All Carl Sandburg College students have access to student support services throughout their educational journeys, regardless of location or modality—that is whether the student is full-time, part-time, or dual credit, and whether that student attends face-to-face at main campus, the branch campus, a dual credit high school, or virtually. Sandburg offers multiple services to help students succeed, including, but not limited to, the following list:

Academic advising: All students are required to meet with their assigned academic advisor prior to registering for classes each semester. This practice is unique but enables Sandburg’s advisors to ensure direction that aligns with each student’s career or transfer goals. This furthers Sandburg’s mission of providing all students with opportunities for success, where success is defined by the student’s ability to reach his/her unique academic goal.

Appointments are traditionally conducted in person but can also be achieved via phone, Microsoft Teams, or email. The advising staff use a Student Planner Software that provides course planning, scheduling and degree/certificate tracking through the MySandburg portal, which affords real-time access to students and advisors. This software allows for easy changes and corrections as the student progresses through their program and gives them a target completion date to work towards. Advisors continue to meet with the students each semester and on request, and dual credit advisors frequently travel to dual credit/additional locations to provide specialized guidance.

Career services: Sandburg offers Career Counseling Services for all students that include:

- Internship support, including guidance on finding an internship/apprenticeship and support for students currently completing internships/apprenticeships
- Access to local job postings and employment opportunities
- Online career advising and recommendation services including career coach, career cruising, the Myers-Briggs type indicator, an occupational outlook handbook, and more.
- Annual career expos that connect students and job seekers with regional employers.
- Job seeker skills development, including “Resume 911” and “Interview Bootcamp.”
- A 16-hour academy focused on soft skills and workplace readiness, for which students earn a vocational skills credit.
- Federal work study support and campus job connection.

Counseling and mental health resources are available to all students, faculty, and staff. Sandburg helps refer students to local, in-person counseling sessions and has a licensed counselor on staff, connects students with mental health screenings via its website, and lists community resources. The college's licensed counselor hosts Mental Health First Aid training sessions for students and employees throughout the year. Sandburg also provides access to TimelyCare for all students and employees. TimelyCare enables 24/7 access to telehealth and mental health services. In January 2026, Sandburg was awarded a state grant to support the expansion of mental health services for students. Sandburg's Care Team meets monthly to gather and review information on at risk or struggling students and deploy supportive interventions, including connections to counseling support, academic services, or student support services.

Developmental education: Sandburg uses multiple measures to ensure students are enrolled in classes appropriate for their academic preparation and demonstrated abilities. Students have options to provide prior standardized assessment scores and/or high school transcripts to show they meet the required levels to opt out of taking the college's entrance assessment, Accuplacer Next Generation. Prospective students pursuing selective admissions programs (nursing, rad tech, dental hygiene) must first pass the Test of Essential Academic Skills (TEAS) exam. Students meet with their assigned academic advisor for an initial hour-long advising appointment where the advisor reviews the student's previous academic transcripts, standardized tests scores when available, and interviews the student to ensure selection of appropriate degrees or certificate programs, as well as appropriate course placement, including prior learning credit.

The English faculty led major changes to developmental coursework, including the elimination of one course in favor of an 8-week sequence that creates opportunities for students at any placement level to finish the gateway courses ENG 101 and ENG 102 within the first year of study.

The Mathematics faculty utilizes a co-requisite approach where students have the option to be enrolled in the gateway course MAT 109 Concepts of Mathematics and a developmental course at the same time. This format allows students to get additional support through the developmental course, but are working alongside students who were placed into MAT 109.

For both English and Math, Sandburg utilizes multiple measures for placement into the gateway course, not relying solely on Accuplacer scores. If a student has completed coursework at the high school level within the past three years, these scores can be utilized for placement into the respective gateway courses.

Disability support services are available for all Sandburg students who self-report a documented disability. Students with disabilities have the same right to equal access to education as all Sandburg students. Sandburg provides the following accommodations:

- Alterations to the physical environment;
- Classroom supplements and tools;
- Testing support, including providing a reader, testing in an alternate location, and extended testing time; and
- Permission to use tools and services in the classroom (voice recorders, guided dogs, ASL interpreters, etc.).

Financial aid resources and support are available to all incoming and current Sandburg students, including:

- Federal financial aid and FAFSA resources and support, both online and in-person;
- Clear communication on tuition, fees, and payment deadlines;
- Guidance on financial tools and credit, including tax credits and external assistance programs;
- In 2025, Sandburg introduced Transact in response to student feedback on the need for online bill payment. Transact allows students to pay their bill electronically, enroll in payment plans, share accounts with parents/guardians and contributors, view their recent payments, and access their annual tax forms.

Myriad scholarships, grants, and aid opportunities including:

- Federal Pell guidance and dispersal for qualifying students. In FY25 , \$6,641,408 in federal Pell dollars were awarded to 895 Sandburg students, which accounted for 33% of Sandburg’s student population.
- Promise programs for eligible high school graduates from Knox and Warren counties that serve as last-payer full tuition scholarships. In FY25, \$1,312,753 in Promise scholarships enabled 222 students to access postsecondary education at Sandburg.
- Foundation-provided scholarships for academic excellence, and specialized scholarships by donor-directed support. In FY25, \$294,000 in Foundations scholarships helped 315 Sandburg students pursue their degrees. Scholarship recipients are recognized at an annual scholarship reception.
- Foundation-provided grants and awards. In 2025, the Foundation awarded “Life Happens” grants, specialized grants for higher-cost academic programs, and textbook/course supply grants totaling \$112,000 to 258 Sandburg students.
- Grant-funded student aid, including gas cards for transportation assistance, provision of course supplies, and reduction of course and exam fees.

Resource rooms operate on both Sandburg campuses. The Galesburg Resource Room is open to all students staff, and faculty, while the Carthage Resource Room also serves as a regional food bank open to all. The Resource Rooms provide food (both non-perishable and fresh or frozen meat/produce) and supplies, including hygienic supplies and baby/diaper supplies provided through a partnership with regional Loving Bottoms Diaper Bank. The Resource Rooms hold regularly staff walk-in hours and appointment opportunities. In FY25 (p.15), Sandburg’s Resource Rooms saw 1,536 visits impacting 5,491 individuals including 492 children. 16,323 pounds of food were provided to Sandburg’s students and community that year alone.

Student engagement offices help create a welcoming, diverse space on both Sandburg campuses and foster collaboration, community impact, and leadership building for students. Student engagement activities include:

- Student orientation, including specialized orientation for international students, and Take Charge enrollment days

- Student engagement calendar and events

- The Student Government Association (SGA), the officially recognized student governance body for Sandburg, composed of 15 elected senators and five executive officers. SGA serves under a constitution as a liaison between the student body and the college, governs student organizations, and assists with student engagement events.

- Student ambassador programs, wherein students serve as tour guides and ambassadors for prospective and new students, staff the resource rooms and other engagement events, and participate in leadership development opportunities including regional and national conferences.

- Many student clubs and organizations

- Student leadership development and support, including community service. Sandburg's director of student engagement & leadership tracks the total community impact of student service, and helps students find volunteer/engagement opportunities via an app.

- Diversity and inclusion events and programs, led by culturally-focused student clubs and organizations.

- Leadership and honors clubs and organizations, including Phi Theta Kappa honor society, Men of Distinction (MOD) and Women of Character (WOC), which focus on developing leaders through academic distinction and community service.

- Oversight of transit program and Resource Rooms.

The Testing Center, located in the welcome center, provides access to the college's placement test, the Accuplacer. Students can also access the Test of Essential Academic Skills (TEAS), Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), College-Level Examination Program (CLEP), HiSet, and proctored class exams. The Testing Center is available by appointment, and also works with walk-in applicants to take the Accuplacer on scheduled Take Charge Enrollment Days.

Transportation is a large barrier in Sandburg's district, which encompasses 5,000 square miles of rural farmland across parts of 10 counties in western Illinois. Sandburg dedicates several resources to lessening the transportation barrier for students, including:

- Offering online or synchronous classes. Synchronous classes are especially useful for dual credit courses to enable qualified faculty instruction in rural classrooms where qualified faculty members are hard to access. Sandburg unveiled a Microsoft Teams classroom in 2025 to further enhance the quality of synchronous instruction across locations.

- Sandburg partners with Galesburg Transit System to enable all students and employees free access to bus routes. In FY25 (p.19), 8,891 riders utilized a Sandburg ID to use public transit.

- Providing gas cards and mileage reimbursement to qualifying students through braided funding from several grants. Programs include gas cards for health and life science students, who travel in high numbers to clinical sites throughout Sandburg's district, and gas cards/mileage reimbursement for career & technical education students for internship/apprenticeship/career exploration activities.

TRIO Student Support Services include three TRIO programs that offer college access and success to eligible students. TRIO programs are administered and funded by the United States Department of Education. TRIO SSS helps first generation, low-income participants graduate from Sandburg and transfer to a four-year college or university in pursuit of a bachelor's degree. Sandburg has hosted a TRIO SSS program since 1997. TRIO Upward Bound and Upward Bound Math-Science prepares first-generation and income-eligible college bound students for success in higher education. Math-Science specifically provides tailored programming and encourages college bound students to pursue postsecondary degrees in STEM fields. Sandburg received its first TRIO Upward Bound Math-Science grant in the 2017-2018 academic year. In FY25, 140 first-generation and low-income students were supported by TRIO and Upward Bound programs. The program is highly impactful. 86% of all TRIO students persist from one academic year to the next, almost double Sandburg's overall fall-to-fall retention rate. 64% of each cohort graduate with an associate's degree or certificate within four years, and 49% transfer to a four-year institution within four years. All these metrics place Sandburg's TRIO program well above required metric targets for federally-funded TRIO programs. In February 2026, Sandburg hosted a celebration honoring 25 years of TRIO SSS programming.

Tutoring services: Face-to-face tutoring is available for all Sandburg students through the Tutoring Center, located on the main campus. The Tutoring Center acts as a hub of tutoring activity and reaches beyond the bounds of the Tutoring Center itself and beyond the main campus in Galesburg. Tutoring is widely accessible for all Sandburg students in multiple ways: in-person at the Galesburg and Branch campuses, online, and via Teams. Online tutoring is available through Sandburg's contract with Brainfuse, a company offering online tutoring services and study aids, to provide free, 24-hour tutoring. Brainfuse offers their one-on-one live tutoring service via computer, tablet, or smartphone.

Veterans services are available for student veterans, military personnel, and their dependents. The college assists students in accessing federal, state, and military educational benefits, submitting required certification each semester, and navigating prior credit evaluations and military transcripts. Veterans receive clear policies on satisfactory academic progress, tuition assistance, in-district tuition eligibility, and protections during pending VA payments or active-duty activation. Sandburg retains a dedicated coordinator of financial aid, veterans & military services to support these students and advise them through their time at Sandburg.

Library services: Sandburg's Library has physical library spaces at the Main Campus. The libraries are open fifty hours per week when classes are in session and include computer lab spaces. Library services also offer the following to all students:

- Main campus MakerSpace with 3D printers, laser cutters, computers, craft supplies, class space.
- Chromebook / laptop / iPad rental program for all students. Sandburg is in the process of transitioning all loaner Chromebooks to laptops for more compatibility with Microsoft to align with student needs.
- Online catalog, research databases, subject guides.
- Research and citation assistance, and "Ask a Librarian" online service.
- Embedded librarianship in select courses / by request.

Technology services including:

- Help desk support, either in-person in Sandburg’s main campus library, online via the help desk email, or by phone
- Laptop/Chromebook lending program
- On-campus podcast studio and “One-Button” video creation studio

Specialized support: In response to student voice and the down trend in retention in 2025 (Criterion 3.G), and in alignment with Sandburg’s 2024 – 2029 Equity Plan, Sandburg has developed the following specialized student support programs and activities.

- Retention intervention and support through partnership with Re-Up Education, which works with Sandburg to directly contact stop-out students and help support their transition back into college and through the attainment of their desired credential. Sandburg is also participating in a state-wide community of practice on reducing DFW rates to help guide retention practices and help meet goals on retention metrics laid out in the Equity Plan. |
- Specialized support and better understanding of needs for students who require English language acquisition and support is a key strategy outlined in the Equity Plan. Sandburg is working to increase enrollment of students who utilize English as a second language, and to offer specialized support to those students once they enroll. Details on successes in this work are shared in the 2026 Equity Plan Implementation Plan Summary.
- 28% of Sandburg students in 2025 indicated that they support children/dependents. These students retain and graduate at lower rates than the total student body. Sandburg is working to connect these students to supports through community partnerships and develop a peer community with the student parent group launched in 2025.
- Another group highlighted in the Equity Plan is “nontraditional” students over 24, who make up 29% of Sandburg’s student population and retain, persist, and complete a lower rates than the total student body. Among the efforts to reduce time to degree and meet these student needs is Sandburg’s Charge Forward program, an eight-week blended learning program that takes place one night a week. At the end of the program, students will earn an associate in arts.
- Sandburg also invests in dedicated staff and faculty for student support, including grant-funded transitions navigators for CTE, HLP, and English Language Learner students. Transitions navigators work directly with these students in a caseload model to keep them engaged in coursework, connect them to internal resources, and support them in the pursuit of external resources. Sandburg also grants release time to faculty in select programs to act as remedial support specialists in examinations for highly technical programs.

Ensuring Equitable Access Across Locations

Sandburg students can find information about the wide array of student support services via Sandburg’s website, in the student success guidebook / planner, and on screens/bulletin boards at every Sandburg location. Sandburg faculty and front-line staff also work to refer students to services based on their communicated needs.

Dual credit students have the same access to student support services as full and part-time “traditional” students. Dual credit students are issued a college ID that grants them access to campus, and to Sandburg athletic and student life events, as well as any discounts provided to college students by area businesses. Students are informed of these resources during dual credit informational outreach, during “Charge Up!” orientation and, again, through online communications and contact with faculty/staff throughout the semester. Sandburg also ensures the high school counselors are aware of these resources. The high schools have a dual credit bulletin board on which dual credit announcements, student life activities, and other items of interest are posted. Sandburg works with each high school to meet the needs of dual credit students, and dual credit students also have access to high school services such as counseling, library services and disability support.

The bookstore also works with students at a distance. Textbooks and other items can be purchased online and shipped to the Branch or to the individual. If such items arrive at the Branch, the student is called to let him/her know the items are available for pickup. Sandburg is currently exploring a new academic resources provider, selected by a committee who evaluated vendor proposals using a comprehensive rubric. This change was implemented to increase student access to online and flexibly priced course materials and enhance student-centered features.

At its additional location visit in 2025, Sandburg was found satisfactory in ensuring equitable access to its student resources across its additional locations.

Sandburg also engaged with students on their needs in the development of its 2024 – 2029 Equity Plan through surveys and focus groups. This feedback was instrumental in the development of the Equity Plan and student support actions contained therein. Sandburg’s Equity Committee reissues the equity survey to students each spring.

Faculty Resources

Sandburg values professional development to help ensure academic rigor. Carl Sandburg College highlights the importance of professional development into the Strategic Plan:

“E. Culture of Continuous Learning and Development

1. Ensure professional development and growth opportunities for employees.

1. Promote professional growth and development opportunities that contribute to student success.

2. Support professional development opportunities focused on teaching and learning strategies, technology, course delivery methods, and assessment practices.”

Sandburg has tools available for both full-time and adjunct faculty to stay current in their disciplines and to be skilled in their teaching roles, including Faculty In-Service Workshops, Faculty Moodle Orientation, and TechConnect.

Sandburg’s Faculty Workshops provide professional growth opportunities for all faculty to enrich their contribution to the College mission. At the beginning of the fall and spring semesters, full-time faculty participate in the day-long event. The Faculty Growth and Development Committee (focused on enhancing the professional development of faculty peers) forms the agenda based upon faculty input, collaborates with administration, faculty and staff to secure presenters and facilitators, and follows up with faculty evaluation. Sessions focus on pedagogy, technology tools, student resources, and strengthening of the professional community. Adjuncts are invited to attend. Individuals unable to

attend are offered an additional evening each January to provide accessibility and participation. The Adjunct Workshop is a different event that covers similar but not identical topics. Resources from past Faculty Workshops are kept for all faculty use.

The Faculty Growth and Development Committee also supports faculty in the pursuit of continuing education credits, peer reviews of materials and syllabi, and building of professional development opportunities. In 2025 Sandburg conducted a survey among faculty who completed professional development through the Committee, and created a record of the Committee's impact across the institution.

The Faculty Moodle Orientation helps faculty orient themselves with the Moodle Learning Management System, which is utilized by Sandburg's online, hybrid, and face-to-face classes. Moodle incorporates convenient grading tools that are easily accessible for students and ensures consistent management for faculty. Students are automatically enrolled in Moodle courses based on the official class roster. Sandburg also places resources for faculty, assessment of student learning, and program review in Moodle LMS landing pages to ensure the sufficiency of resources and ease of use for faculty. Academic Services also operates a Faculty Resources Share Point site that holds a myriad of resource materials for faculty use.

Sandburg grants faculty credit for completing professional activities. Credit is awarded for advancement on the salary schedule for participation in professional activities, which are approved in advance by the Vice President of Academic Services. Coursework at an accredited university is also awarded credit. A revised form has been implemented to make granting credit for professional activities more efficient. Sandburg provides opportunities for sabbatical leave and faculty tuition reimbursement. According to the Professional Negotiations Agreement (p.25), a faculty member who has served six consecutive years without a sabbatical leave at Sandburg is eligible upon request for sabbatical leave.

The Faculty Teaching and Learning Center (FTLC) is a dedicated staff that provides technology support services for faculty. The FTLC helps faculty implement pedagogical strategies and techniques that make a significant impact on student engagement and success. FTLC also connects faculty with state-of-the-art technology to enhance student engagement and learning.

The opportunity to participate in TechConnect is available for all faculty annually. This workshop is scheduled during the summer and facilitated by the Faculty Teaching and Learning Center (FTLC). Topics range from online pedagogy to outcomes assessment, but each workshop incorporates hands-on training allowing faculty to apply the techniques they have learned.

Infrastructure for Student Support

Sandburg has invested heavily in infrastructure for student learning and support. Key examples include:

- A newly renovated student Welcome Center in 2025, complete with group work study spaces, seating, presentation space, an activity room, board room, cafe, and a centralized home for student services including the book store, financial aid, student development and testing center.
- A new Science & Technology Center that serves as instructional home for science and technology courses and health science programs. The S&T houses a state-of-the-art dental hygiene clinic, lab spaces for chem, bio, and physics, a simulation lab for nursing, health program offices and classrooms, and an atrium space for campus events.
- Existing classroom infrastructure specialized to program need, including the Center for Manufacturing Excellence (CME) which houses automotive bays, a welding floor, equipment,

and simulators, industrial maintenance and CNC programs, classrooms, and offices. Sandburg also hosts its unique Mortuary Science program in a dedicated building, complete with a lab and embalming space.

- Sandburg supports innovation in learning infrastructure with Foundation Innovation grants, external grants, and its annual budget (expanded in Criterion 4B).

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3.E. Assessment of Student Learning

The institution improves the quality of educational programs based on its assessment of student learning.

Argument

Embedded Report on Assessment of Student Learning

All faculty are expected to participate in assessment of student learning requirements according to faculty position descriptions and Procedure 2.4.0 on full-time faculty duties and responsibilities (p.257). Dual credit instructors are equally responsible for assessment participation, per the dual credit contract. Assessment of student learning is required and managed equally at the Galesburg main campus and the Carthage campus. The Board also holds a memorandum of agreement (p.86) with the Sandburg Education Association (SEA), signed in 2014, agreeing to a joint commitment to ongoing assessment and the continuous improvement of educational programs.

Assessment at Sandburg is led by two faculty-chaired committees: the outcomes assessment committee (OAC), and the general education outcomes program assessment committee (GEOPAC).

- **OAC:** oversees assessment of program level outcomes (PLOs) for all programs that culminate in a certificate or an associate in applied science degrees.
- **GEOPAC:** oversees assessment of general education outcomes (GEOs) across all courses, prefixes, and programs.

Both committees assist faculty in the formalized assessment of student learning process.

Sandburg defines “program” as anything that culminates in a degree or certificate. Under this definition, transfer pathway associate in arts and associate in science degrees are considered programs. For these programs, the five institutional GEOs serve as program-level outcomes, largely due to the myriad pathways and credit hour selections that students can participate in that culminate in the degrees. The merit of using GEOs as program outcomes for associate degree programs rests in the recognition that transfer students must demonstrate broad competencies across multiple disciplines.

Other programs include technical academic offerings that culminate in a certificate, associate in applied science degree, or both (at varying levels of credential completion). These programs determine their own program level outcomes, which are more technical and allow students to demonstrate the specific competencies required to obtain employment or licensure credentials in the specific field. Examples of these programs include:

Assessment of student attainment of GEOs and PLOs roll up from the course level to inform prefix, program, and institutional assessment.

Changes to Assessment Since Comprehensive Evaluation

Since Sandburg's comprehensive evaluation in 2021, the college has established or improved on the following:

- Updated program level outcomes for all certificates and associate degree programs;
- A PLO assessment process for curricular areas.
- A GEO assessment process for curricular areas; and,
- An assessment process for cocurricular offerings that make educational claims.

Efforts to create new and improve existing facets of the college's assessment practices were led by GEOPAC and OAC, with support from the institutional effectiveness, academic services, and student development teams at Sandburg. Sandburg's participation in the HLC Assessment Academy made a large impact on improvement efforts. Sandburg is set to present its final project findings to Assessment Academy peers in October 2026.

The newly contrived assessment infrastructure incorporates clear practices, analysis of key student attainment and performance data, and evidence-based actions to improve student learning. Sandburg's assessment process is multi-faceted to consider all avenues for student learning at the college. While challenges persist, Sandburg is confident in the strides it has made to build a culture of rigorous, comprehensive, collaborative assessment. This shift represents a transformation in the culture of assessment at Sandburg from classroom-focused assessment of teaching to a focus on assessment of student learning through analysis of student attainment of set learning outcomes (both general and programmatic).

Assessment Processes at Sandburg

Component	GEO Assessment	PLO Assessment*	Cocurricular Assessment
Purpose	Assess student attainment of general education competencies across all courses and prefixes.	Assess student attainment of program-specific outcomes in all certificate and AAS programs.	Assess student learning in cocurricular programs where explicit learning outcomes are claimed.
Outcomes Assessed	<u>Five GEOs:</u> Communication, Critical Thinking, Cultural Diversity, Information Technology, Quantitative Skills.	<u>Program-specific PLOs</u> aligned to industry standards, accreditation requirements, and Bloom's Taxonomy.	<u>Employability skills outcomes</u> (e.g., communication, professionalism, time management).
Assessment Design	Institution-wide <u>curriculum mapping</u> ensures GEOs are embedded in courses, map to prefix and program levels. Aligned with online course standards rubrics as well.	<u>Curriculum maps</u> link PLOs to courses; programs follow a structured assessment cycle and checklist.	Assessment aligned directly to stated learning outcomes of the Employability Skills Academy program.
Methods / Instruments	<u>Standardized GEO rubrics</u> completed in each course; faculty select assignments or activities for assessment.	<u>Course-level data</u> (grades and success rates aligned to mapped outcomes), accreditor-required measures.	<u>ESA Final Reflection survey</u> with quantitative and qualitative student self-assessment.
Cycle / Frequency	All courses assessed every semester; GEOs rotate by term to ensure full annual coverage.	Annual cycle required for all programs; full documentation through <u>assessment checklist</u> .	Cohort-based; administered at completion of the program. Program runs each semester depending on cohort need.
Data Collection	<u>Student-level rubric data</u> collected each semester with	<u>Program-level attainment data</u> compiled from course	<u>Student survey data</u> collected from ESA participants at

Assessment of General Education Outcomes

The GEO assessment process operates on a carefully structured rotation designed to distribute faculty workload while ensuring comprehensive annual assessment of all five outcomes. GEOs 1 (Communication) and 2 (Critical Thinking) are assessed in the fall semester, while GEOs 3 (Cultural Diversity), 4 (Information Technology), and 5 (Quantitative Skills) are assessed in the spring semester. Some courses and programs operate on modified schedules based on their specific program timelines; for example, courses offered only in spring are assessed on extended timelines to ensure all five GEOs are assessed over an appropriate period.

Faculty members are required to complete a GEO rubric for every course every semester, with assigned GEOs determined by which outcomes appear in course briefs and syllabi. Faculty in Galesburg, Carthage, online, and at all additional locations complete the same GEO rubrics.

The institutional effectiveness department manages the complex rotation of GEO rubrics and faculty assignments through a detailed tracking spreadsheet that monitors which GEOs are assessed in which courses each semester. Faculty also monitor GEO alignment with course outcomes in the ongoing Online Course Standards rubrics, which note GEOs in each course alongside course outcomes.

GEO rubrics are uploaded and assigned to faculty members through an "Assessment" course in Moodle, the college's learning management system. Each instructor's GEO rubric is directly uploaded as an assignment into the Moodle course that only the corresponding faculty member can access. Faculty download the rubric, complete within the semester based on their own assessment activity, and upload into the assignment dropbox by the end of each semester. This delivery method ensures faculty accessibility and provides clarity on responsibility for adjunct instructors who may have less structured support in assessment processes. The centralized Moodle course also serves as a repository for assessment resources, including instructional videos, completed examples, and troubleshooting guidance developed by GEOPAC for faculty support.

GEOPAC maintains comprehensive tracking of GEO rubric submissions across all faculty members to monitor compliance and identify faculty members who may require additional support.

Faculty Support and Professional Development

Since developing and piloting the GEO assessment process, GEOPAC has focused on change management, generating faculty buy-in, and implementing professional development opportunities for faculty. The faculty and staff co-chairs have led training sessions at faculty assembly, full-time and adjunct faculty training workshops, and departmental meetings. Members also created a comprehensive suite of support materials including demonstration videos showing step-by-step rubric completion, PowerPoint presentations explaining the GEO framework and assessment rationale, and guiding documents on the GEO rubric downloading and uploading process. GEOPAC also established scheduled office hours where faculty members can receive individualized assistance with assessment questions, technical challenges, or conceptual concerns about implementing GEOs in their courses.

Generating and maintaining faculty buy-in remains an ongoing challenge. Participation rates demonstrate progress but also highlight the need for continued engagement: Fall 2024 saw 236 of 337 faculty members (70.0%) complete their GEO assessments, while Spring 2025 participation increased

to 222 of 305 faculty members (72.8%). Faculty completion held at 73% in fall 2025, **but rose to 81% in spring 2026**. As expected, adjunct faculty complete GEO assessment at lower rates than full-time faculty, though GEOPAC are working to assist adjunct faculty. While these rates reflect an increase in engagement, Sandburg continues working toward universal participation through ongoing communication about the value of assessment and streamlining of assessment processes to minimize faculty burden.

Data Compilation, Analysis, and Use

The institutional effectiveness department compiles all GEO rubric data upon completion at the end of each semester. A comprehensive institutional spreadsheet captures all GEO assessment data. This raw data is represented to stakeholders in an institutional GEO attainment dashboard.

The dashboard also breaks up GEO attainment by academic prefix, allowing academic departments to examine performance in their specific discipline areas. GEO attainment information is integrated into prefix-level student dashboards alongside other programmatic data and student performance outcomes (like retention, persistence, success, and completion), which is distributed to faculty, deans, and academic leadership. Dashboards are made available on Moodle and the “institutional effectiveness” tile of mySandburg (the college’s login system). Faculty can also download the raw GEO attainment data in excel format from the dashboard.

GEOPAC supports prefixes in the analysis of this data. Each spring, every prefix reviews GEO attainment data for strengths and weaknesses. GEOPAC helps facilitate these conversations via meetings with each department’s faculty and overseeing coordinator or dean. To reduce faculty time and burden, GEOPAC offers support in use of AI in initial data analysis. These analyses are recommended to faculty as a starting point for analysis. Sandburg stresses that faculty have the final word in GEO analysis and continuous improvement, and faculty are encouraged to review the analyses for accuracy and helpful takeaways. GEOPAC provides guidance around AI prompt language, and reviews all data submitted by departments to ensure faculty-led analyses with limited administrative and guideline work from AI. GEOPAC tracked progress in the first year of this process via a project dashboard.

Faculty, department chairs, program coordinators, and deans reach a consensus on final GEO analysis data and input data-based planned improvements in a GEO Report Questionnaire. These annual assessments roll up into the comprehensive five-year program review process, ensuring that GEO attainment data influences both short-term adjustments and long-term strategic program decisions. Highlighted changes based on GEO attainment data analysis in 2026 include: the expansion of formative assessments and low-stakes practice opportunities, integration of applied and case-based learning strategies, early intervention systems for at-risk students, and alignment of course design with Quality Matters standards. Additionally, several programs have redesigned high-risk courses, enhanced consistency across sections, and strengthened direct assessment methods to ensure more reliable measurement of learning outcomes. All of these continuous improvements are recorded in the GEO attainment questionnaire.

Updated Program Level Outcomes

OAC assisted each program in PLO updates and revision in fall 2025 and spring 2026. Academic services leadership supported this process through the provision of faculty lunches in a “lunch and

learn” format, wherein OAC representatives counseled faculty on how to analyze and update existing PLOs and springboard into the assessment process.

Updated PLOs are:

- Faculty authored
- Aligned with Blooms’ Taxonomy
- Informed by industry standards and advisory committee input where available
- Reviewed by the curriculum committee and adopted by faculty assembly vote (p.142)
- Updated in the catalog page for each program
- Aligned with courses via course maps to drive data analysis of PLO attainment

Assessment of Program-Level Outcomes

Transfer Programs

As previously stated, transfer programs (including associate in arts and associate in science degrees) utilize the five GEOs as program-level learning outcomes. The GEO assessment infrastructure described above therefore simultaneously addresses both general education and program-level assessment for transfer programs.

Technical Programs (Certificates and AAS degrees)

In the fall of 2025, Sandburg unveiled its assessment cycle and requirements for program level assessment for programs that culminate in a certificate or associate in applied science degree (AAS).OAC tracked implementation of this cycle via a project dashboard.

Sandburg’s PLO assessment process is led by the faculty-chaired Outcomes Assessment Committee (OAC) with support from institutional effectiveness and instructional team. This collaborative approach enables faculty ownership of assessment, subject-matter expertise, institutional alignment through assessment processes, and easy access to PLO attainment data. Faculty representatives on the committee include faculty in nursing, instructional technology, and the program coordinator in mortuary science, deliberately including faculty from programs at different stages of assessment process maturity.

Data Compilation, Analysis, and Use

Each dean or associate vice president is responsible for completing a Program Outcomes Report Questionnaire every spring. These program administrators are responsible for obtaining faculty input on PLO assessment regardless of faculty location, including on the Galesburg and Carthage campuses, in adjunct capacities at additional locations, and online. Currently, the process uses summative course grades and success rates aligned with PLO maps to assess PLO attainment As with GEOs, faculty uses AI analysis as a starting point to help frame PLO attainment. OAC supports faculty in this process, and provides AI prompt language in its checklist to ensure proper use of AI as a tool, but not a final authority on assessment analysis. Faculty have the final word on documented

analysis of PLO attainment data. That analysis is compiled in the Program Outcomes Report Questionnaire. Faculty assist with the completion of these questionnaires after reviewing PLO attainment analysis in each program. The questionnaire serves to document data analysis and planned, data-driven improvement efforts.

Across programs, assessment of program learning outcomes (PLOs) is systematically used to drive continuous improvement. Faculty analyze PLO attainment data to identify gaps—particularly in foundational coursework, applied learning, and key skill areas such as communication, quantitative reasoning, and technology proficiency. In response, programs have implemented targeted interventions including scaffolded assignments, expanded formative assessment, simulation-based learning, curricular redesign, and enhanced student support structures. All changes are represented in the program outcomes report questionnaire.

Accredited Programs

Programs which maintain third-party accreditation also complete assessment according to accreditor requirements. These programs include:

Nursing programs (including the AAS in Nursing (RN), Licensed Practical Nurse certificate, LPN to RN articulation pathway, and one-semester Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) course) are accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN). The nursing department maintains a detailed assessment plan aligned with ACEN standards and submits annual reports to both ACEN and the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR) documenting student learning outcomes, program effectiveness, and continuous improvement efforts.

Dental Hygiene (AAS in dental hygiene) is accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA). The program maintains a comprehensive assessment plan and submits annual CODA reports demonstrating systematic assessment of student learning tied to CODA standards and program quality.

Medical Assisting programs (including both the medical assistant AAS and medical assistant certificate) are accredited by the Medical Assisting Education Review Board (MAERB), a division of the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP). The program maintains a detailed assessment plan and submits updates in its annual reports to MAERB.

Detailed Report: Mortuary Science

As Sandburg reported to HLC in May 2025, the college's AAS in mortuary science program was placed on probation by the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE) following its reaccreditation cycle in April 2025.

ABFSE's April 28, 2025, letter outlined three main areas of concern:

- incorrect accreditation wording on the college's website and in the online catalog (ABFSE Standards 3.2 and 10.7.2),
- lack of a program-level, outcome-specific, comprehensive assessment plan (ABFSE Standard 10.1), and
- absence of formaldehyde testing evidence for each site used as practicum locations for

mortuary science students (ABFSE Standard 7.2.3).

Sandburg addressed plans to remedy these concerns in a June 3, 2025 letter to HLC.

Regarding assessment, mortuary science faculty worked collaboratively with OAC and the institutional effectiveness team to develop a comprehensive assessment plan and assessment data matrix tied to ABFSE standards.

These documents were reviewed by ABFSE in April 2026. At that time, ABFSE voted to restore Sandburg's mortuary science program to full accreditation for the next seven years. As part of this accreditation, Sandburg's mortuary science program will provide an updated assessment plan demonstrating continued analysis and improvement actions to ABFSE by March 1, 2027. Sandburg is proud of these assessment improvement efforts and the timely restoration to good standing with ABFSE and is committed to continued comprehensive assessment of mortuary science student learning.

Assessment of Cocurricular Programs

Defining Cocurricular at Sandburg

Sandburg's definition of cocurricular programs has undergone multiple refinements since 2021 as the institution has worked to clarify which activities require systematic assessment of student learning outcomes. The college's final definition, crystallized during the Assessment Academy midpoint roundtable, follows HLC Assumed Practice B.1.h: "If the institution makes any claims for student learning related to its cocurricular programs, it assesses such student learning and makes improvements."

Under this definition, Sandburg conducts learning outcomes assessment for cocurricular activities only when the institution makes explicit claims about student learning. The college is working to develop outcomes tracking for extra-curricular and student life activities in alignment with the strategic plan but does not consider these efforts to be cocurricular assessment.

Employability Skills Academy Assessment

The only cocurricular activity for which Sandburg makes explicit student learning claims is the Employability Skills Academy (ESA). ESA is required for several technical programs, is available for voluntary student enrollment, and is also offered through workforce development and community education for non-students. The program is administered by the coordinator of career development and consists of 16 hours of instruction delivered over 16 weeks in one-hour weekly sessions.

ESA's stated learning outcomes are aimed at developing specific employability skills including professional communication, workplace etiquette, conflict resolution, time management, and professional presentation. These learning outcomes are publicly stated on the ESA webpage.

The coordinator of career development created a student skills survey directly based on ESA's stated learning outcomes claims. The ESA Final Reflection instrument asks students to self-assess their skill development across all dimensions addressed in the program, providing both quantitative ratings and qualitative feedback on program effectiveness and personal growth.

Assessment follows a cohort model implemented beginning Fall 2024 with registered nursing students. The ESA final reflection is administered at the completion of ESA in the spring, allowing students to reflect on their comprehensive experience and skill development over the full program duration. The coordinator of career development analyzes these results in a Cocurricular Assessment Report Questionnaire and documents next steps for continuous improvement.

Future of Assessment Work at Sandburg

Sandburg's assessment transformation over the past four years has been substantial, but the college recognizes that assessment must continue evolving to remain meaningful, sustainable, and genuinely improve student learning. Several key initiatives will shape the future of assessment at Sandburg.

Online Course Review and Quality Assurance

Led by a professor in music, humanities, and fine arts who received one credit hour of release time to oversee the process, Sandburg has implemented a systematic online course review process. Faculty are compensated to review their course standards, syllabi, curriculum maps, and overall online course quality against established benchmarks. Faculty map their course standards to GEOs and directly connected learning modules/activities. Faculty also provide assessment activities and data and how they are directly connected to GEOs, course objectives, and learning modules. OAC and GEOPAC are planning to scale this structured review process to support technical program-level outcome assessment improvement, leveraging the successful model developed for online courses. The next step from course review and curriculum mapping will be connecting the curricula and assessment activities to program-level outcomes and enhancing data mining capabilities for ease of faculty implementation.

Investment in People and Infrastructure

Sandburg's assessment improvements have been enabled by strategic investments in faculty and staff support. Faculty co-chaired committees ensure faculty leadership and ownership of assessment processes. Monetary support, including release time and work stipends, for online course review and other assessment leadership roles recognizes that meaningful assessment requires dedicated effort and expertise. While no “one size fits all” assessment method fits for Sandburg’s diverse degree and certificate programs, GEOPAC and OAC, in collaboration with the institutional effectiveness department, and with the support of academic leadership, continues to work to streamline assessment practices in alignment with institutional outcomes tracking and program review.

Sandburg is also working to align GEO and PLO assessment practices with new technical capabilities to ease faculty burden, streamline data analysis, and ensure quality. Sandburg will implement Canvas, a more assessment-friendly learning management system (LMS) by July 1, 2027. Input from faculty who work heavily in assessment and from institutional effectiveness staff has been heavily sought to weigh-in on assessment, data analysis, and data visualization capabilities of potential LMS’s. Faculty are already working with instructional technology, academic services, and institutional effectiveness to build an on-ramp for assessment capability in Canvas and will pilot efforts throughout 2026. Assessment leaders are hopeful that this transition will transform assessment from a summative process to a formative tool that enables instructional adjustments throughout the semester. Additional benefits include basing assessment on multiple grading points rather than single assignments and reducing subjectivity by grounding evaluation in concrete performance data.

External grant funding provides additional crucial support for technical program assessment improvement. Sandburg received a Perkins Leadership grant award supporting a contract with WIDS (Worldwide Instructional Design System), a comprehensive curriculum management and assessment platform. The WIDS platform and associated consultant support will assist with outcomes development, curriculum mapping, data generation and management, and assessment plan implementation for Perkins-approved programs including: agriculture, automotive, welding, industrial maintenance, and business. Implementation began in January 2026, with institutional effectiveness ensuring alignment between WIDS-supported assessment development and existing institutional assessment structures including OAC, GEO assessment, and program review processes

Conclusion

Carl Sandburg College has transformed its approach to assessment of student learning over the past four years. What began as a focus on course evaluation has evolved into a comprehensive and systematic approach to understanding and improving student learning. The college has built stronger infrastructure for general education assessment through the GEO process, a formalized process for program outcomes assessment in all technical programs, is increasing faculty participation through strategic use of mentorship and external support and has clarified its approach to cocurricular assessment through careful definition and focused implementation.

Challenges remain, particularly in sustaining faculty engagement, ensuring assessment data consistently drives meaningful improvements, and building the technical infrastructure necessary for more sophisticated assessment approaches. However, Sandburg's progress demonstrates institutional commitment to assessment as a core function rather than a compliance obligation. The college has invested in people, processes, and systems that will sustain assessment improvement, ultimately fulfilling the institution's mission of providing all students with opportunities for success through continuous improvement of educational quality.

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3.F. Program Review

The institution improves its curriculum based on periodic program review.

Argument

Sandburg Five-Year Program Review Process

Sandburg established its foundational program review process in 1993, implementing a five-year review cycle in alignment with Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) requirements. This systematic approach ensures that every program undergoes rigorous evaluation on a regular schedule. Programs reviewed on a rotation include programs within the following categories:

- Career and technical education academic programs
- Academic disciplines (by prefix), including transfer and general education
- Cross-disciplinary instruction (developmental education, employability skills, etc.)
- Student and academic support services

Sandburg invested in institutional capacity to improve the meaning and structure of its program review process as its Quality Initiative from 2015 to 2017.

The program review process represents an extensive self-study that examines multiple dimensions of program quality and effectiveness. Department and program leadership assess program goals, evaluate regional need, examine cost effectiveness, enhance instructional and curricular quality, and drive continuous improvement initiatives.

The institutional effectiveness (IE) department manages the program review process, maintaining schedules, providing comprehensive programmatic data, supporting faculty and administrators as they complete program review, and compiling a final report which is submitted to ICCB each July. IE supplies five-year data for each program/prefix that inform program evaluation, including:

- enrollment rates
- credit hours produced
- program completers
- faculty-to-student ratios
- course-level success rates
- cost-revenue analysis, and
- licensure examination pass rates when applicable.

Faculty and academic service staff who complete program review are also encouraged to review comprehensive program/prefix-level data supplied by IE. While this data is not required as part of ICCB's program review, the data dashboards provide further context as to program success and are aligned with other institutional assessment efforts in general and program-level education outcomes. These dashboards offer real-time access to:

- cost-revenue data,

- student performance outcomes (retention, persistence, success),
- disaggregated enrollment and outcomes data trends,
- enrollment and credit hour trends,
- program/prefix success and drop rate trends, and
- success and grade distribution by course.

In 2024, Sandburg transitioned its program review completion process to Moodle, the institution's learning management system. This created a centralized repository for assessment documentation and resources, and a "one-stop" assessment platform for faculty and academic services staff. The IE department updates and launches the Moodle-based process each January, with completed reviews due at the end of the spring semester (May 31). Academic deans and staff directors over the selected programs are responsible for completing the program review templates. Deans and directors are also responsible for including their teams (faculty chairs, program coordinators, faculty, and departmental staff) in the completion of program review templates. Following completion, IE compiles institutional reports and submits required documentation to ICCB (July). Completed program reviews are preserved in Moodle and the IE-maintained program review repository.

Multiple Avenues for Program Review

Beyond the foundational five-year ICCB program review cycle, Sandburg employs multiple complementary review processes that collectively ensure comprehensive program evaluation and improvement.

Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA):

- Conducted every two years as part of Perkins V requirements.
- Reviews Perkins-funded programs (CTE and health) across six areas: student performance, program size/scope/quality, labor market alignment, programs of study implementation, faculty recruitment/retention/training, and access/equity efforts.
- Engages stakeholders: students, prospective students, parents, industry partners, workforce boards through surveys. Surveys are created by IE and disseminated by the CTE department.
- Last completed in 2024. Sandburg is currently compiling the 2026 CLNA.
- The CLNA also serves as a mid-point review for the five-year program review process. It helps track program viability and implemented changes, and takes a deeper look at equity metrics within the programs.
- The CLNA is shared with stakeholders and internally within departments.

Third-Party Accreditor Reports: Programs with specialized accreditation undergo annual review according to accreditor-specific formats and processes. These include:

- Nursing (RN/PN): Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) - annual report
- Mortuary Science: American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE) - annual report
- Dental Hygiene: Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) - annual report
- Medical Assisting: Medical Assisting Education Review Board (MAERB/CAAHEP) - annual report

- Accreditor reports are completed by corresponding program coordinators with assistance from the associate vice president of health professions and HLP support staff. Reports are reviewed at department meetings and shared with stakeholders.
- The director of accreditation keeps a repository of annual accreditor reports and notes their completion in the accreditation timeline.
- Accreditor reports also serve as an annual touch-point to track changes and data reviewed in the five-year program review process. By following accreditor-required metrics, they also assist with maintaining program accreditation and reviewing programs for compliance, viability, and necessary changes each year.

Department Meetings: Monthly academic department meetings provide ongoing opportunities for program review and improvement. Each program or prefix contained within a department reports on monthly updates and planned improvements, creating a culture of continuous assessment and responsiveness to emerging needs. Department meeting minutes document these discussions and serve as evidence of ongoing program evaluation.

Annual Budget Planning: The budgeting process incorporates program review through examination of cost-revenue data for each program. This financial review considers program viability factors including enrollment, regional need, faculty-to-student ratios, and accreditor requirements, ensuring that resource allocation decisions align with program quality and sustainability considerations.

Student Evaluation Feedback: Student course evaluations are collected by the IE department and shared with academic deans, department chairs, and the associate VP of nursing and health professions each semester.

- Evaluations are downloaded and compiled for each instructor.
- The program dean/chair/associate VP review student feedback.
- Student feedback is discussed privately with each faculty, reviewed at the department level in department meetings, and folded into program review, accreditor reports, and the CLNA.
- In 2025, based on faculty feedback, the IE department condensed the course evaluation to five questions. This was done in part to encourage a higher yield of participants, and to directly connect student voice to general education outcomes attainment. IE also expanded dissemination methods for the survey and provided faculty updates as to course completion percentages throughout the semester.
- In 2026, Sandburg will transition to class-structured analysis (rather than instructor-centered) for improved course-level assessment.

Curriculum Improvement Based on Program Review

Sandburg's program review processes have driven substantial curriculum improvements and program modifications that respond to identified needs and opportunities.

Recent curriculum revisions driven by program review, the CLNA, accreditor reports, and student feedback include:

- **Agriculture certificates:** Restructured AAS degree to include stackable credentials, providing flexible pathways to educational and career goals.
- **Automotive curriculum & AAS:** Revised and updated to align with evolving industry standards and technologies, introduction of two-year AAS degree.

- **CNA and Practical Nursing expansion:** Expanded to Carthage campus based on regional labor market data indicating workforce shortages; invested in infrastructure and faculty; reviewed and approved by ACEN.

- **Education/early childhood education courses:** Created transferable courses to springboard students into bachelor's degree programs, responding to regional demand for elementary and early childhood educators identified through program review.

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3.G. Student Success Outcomes

The institution’s student success outcomes demonstrate continuous improvement, taking into account the student populations it serves and benchmarks that reference peer institutions.

Argument

Student Success Outcomes

Carl Sandburg College demonstrates continuous improvement in student success outcomes by monitoring multi-year trends, evaluating progress toward institutional goals, and using disaggregated data to address equity gaps among the student populations. Institutional student performance outcomes focus on enrollment, retention, persistence, and completion for non-dual credit, degree-seeking students and are aligned with the college’s mission as an open-access community college. The college also tracks IPEDS-based performance outcomes for comparative benchmarking and goal setting.

Continuous Improvement Since 2021

Sandburg has worked to show continuous improvement in its federally reported benchmarks since its last comprehensive review in 2021. Sandburg’s IPEDS indicators remain at or near the peer-group mean. The college has drastically improved its 150% of time graduation rate, remained steady in its 150% transfer rate, and improved its full-time retention rate. Improving retention across student groups remains a key focus effort for Sandburg.

IPEDS Outcomes - Sandburg vs. Peer Group Mean Outcomes						
	Sandburg 2021	Peer Group Mean 2021	Sandburg 2025	Peer Group Mean 2025	5-year Change	Vs. Mean
150% graduation	36%	40%	50%	49%	+14%	1%
150% transfer	16%	19%	15%	17%	-1%	-2%
Full-time retention	59%	65%	63%	67%	+4%	-4%
Source: IPEDS Data Summary Report 2021; IPEDS Data Summary Report 2025.						

Recognition of these efforts was affirmed externally when Sandburg was named among the Top 200 Aspen Prize Community Colleges in 2026. Compared against 972 reporting institutions nationwide, Sandburg performed above the national average on all Aspen indicators. Notable highlights include 91 completers per 100 full-time equivalent undergraduates (national average: 57.4%), a 36% completion rate for part-time, degree- or certificate-seeking undergraduates within eight years (national average: 24.4%), and a 55% three-year graduation and transfer rate (national average: 47.7%).

Established Internal Student Outcomes

In 2024, Carl Sandburg College formalized select student performance outcomes as a central

component of its 2025–2029 Equity Plan. The plan’s primary aim is to identify equity gaps across student indicators and establish five-year goals to close those gaps while increasing student performance outcomes institution wide. It is important to note that these outcomes differ from IPEDS reporting numbers because they are more comprehensive – they include part-time and non-first time students, and exclude dual credit (due to dual credit student goals differing largely from those of degree-seeking students). These outcomes are tracked through a student performance outcomes dashboard that is shared across campus and updated each semester.

The four institutional outcomes monitored are:

- **Enrollment**, measured for non-dual credit, degree-seeking students using the ICCB E1 Report for fall enrollment and the ICCB A1 Report for annual enrollment;

Goal: Enrollment of 3,000 students by 2030.

- **Retention**, defined as consistent fall-to-fall enrollment of all non-dual credit, degree-seeking students (excluding completers), with a benchmark year of 2022;

Goal: Retention of 55% for total student body by 2029.

- **Persistence**, defined as consistent fall-to-spring enrollment of the same population (excluding completers), also benchmarked to 2022; and

Goal: Persistence of 80% for total student body by 2029.

- **Completion**, which tracks certificate or degree completion within 150% of program time (three years) for cohorts from 2020 through 2023.

Goal: completion of 54% for total student body by 2029.

All four outcomes are disaggregated across key student populations, including race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status (defined as Pell-eligibility), age (students 24 and older defined as nontraditional), caregiver and dependent status, and diverse abilities, including students with self-reported, documented disabilities.

The definitions underlying these outcomes were the product of deliberate institutional discussion. College committees convened to determine how to best capture student success in ways that reflect the full breadth of the student population served. As a public community college, Sandburg enrolls many students whose goals include skills attainment or course completion, not only transfer or degree attainment. To ensure consistency and clarity, student performance outcomes are anchored to non-dual credit, degree-seeking students, while dual credit student success, completion, and matriculation are tracked through their own dedicated metrics dashboard.

Enrollment goals were established in 2025 and serve as the foundation for a Strategic Enrollment Plan currently in development, with completion anticipated in July 2026. The Plan will be overseen by Strategic Enrollment Management Committee which meets monthly to review student outcomes and other institutional data, and make meaningful improvements. These goals include:

- Increase institutional enrollment to 3,000 students by 2030 — informed by historical enrollment patterns and an identified gap in postsecondary credential attainment within the district.

- Increase matriculation at district high schools to 37% of each graduating class by 2030, a target grounded in dual credit trends.

- The college also established a goal to maintain Aspen Prize indicators at or above the national average, with benchmarking conducted against Illinois community colleges, rural colleges, and institutions with fewer than 3,000 students. Aspen Prize indicators are based data reporting to IPEDS and National Student Clearinghouse. Therefore, they do not paint a comprehensive picture of student performance at Sandburg, but fold in well with institutional performance outcomes and serve as a natural benchmarking tool.

Progress Toward Equity-Focused Student Performance Outcomes

Carl Sandburg College has achieved measurable improvement across multiple student success outcomes over recent years.

- Persistence has increased steadily, rising from 77.9% in 2023 to 78.6% in 2024 and reaching 79.5% in 2025.

- Completion rates have similarly trended upward, from 51.5% in 2023 to 53.5% in 2024 and 55.5% in 2025.

Data analysis indicates a clear relationship between these measures: students who persist from fall to fall are significantly more likely to persist through graduation, reinforcing the importance of retention as a lever for institutional improvement.

- Retention (fall-to-fall enrollment) rose from 49.7% in 2023 to 51.5% in 2024, but declined to 48.2% in 2025.

While this result falls below the goal established in the Equity Plan, the college has recognized it as a critical data point that underscores the need to concentrate targeted efforts on retention strategies. Sandburg views this as an opportunity to direct intentional intervention (highlighted in Criterion 3 section on “Specialized Support”), with the understanding that improved retention will drive corresponding gains in persistence and completion. The goal of 55% retention in 2029 is still reasonable and attainable. The 2026 Implementation Plan Summary of the Equity Plan highlights Sandburg’s path to these student outcomes increases, and outlines next steps in a focus on retention.

Student Outcomes Tracking Processes

Student performance outcomes are reviewed on a continuous basis. The outcomes dashboard is updated each semester and includes progress tracking toward Equity Plan goals. The equity committee — which evolved from a leadership-appointed construction committee into a faculty co-chaired body operating within shared governance — reviews student performance outcomes and progress toward institutional goals monthly. Meeting minutes are made available in a faculty resource database and reported to faculty assembly each month, ensuring broad institutional transparency and engagement.

Enrollment data is tracked at multiple intervals. Ten-year institutional enrollment dashboards, informed by the ICCB fall E1 report, are updated each fall and shared through the internal "mySandburg" portal and with key committees, including the Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) committee. Additionally, weekly enrollment dashboards — compiled by the Institutional Effectiveness (IE) department — are posted to the mySandburg portal and distributed to institutional leadership each Monday, enabling real-time awareness of enrollment trends.

At the programmatic level, student performance outcomes are continually assessed to inform pedagogical, curricular, and programmatic continuous improvements. Disaggregated outcomes are

examined at the program and prefix levels through prefix-level dashboards, five-year program reviews, and third-party accreditor annual reports, all of which contain student performance data analysis relevant to their respective student populations. Examples of improvements made based on these reviews are included in Criterion 3F.

Benchmarking and Reporting

Sandburg's commitment to data integrity and external accountability is further demonstrated through robust reporting to federal, state, and third-party accrediting agencies. The Institutional Effectiveness department oversees data collection, assurance, and reporting, with support from the financial aid, business office, and human resources teams.

To inform continuous improvement, Sandburg also utilizes the IPEDS Data Feedback Report and the ICCB report on statewide enrollments and comparisons. Sandburg maintains IPEDS reporting, participates in peer comparison cohorts, and holds longitudinal IPEDS data extending back to 1986. Sandburg's IPEDS metrics were reviewed by HLC as part of the Student Success Goals process and found to be in line with outcomes rates for peer institutions in the rural colleges cohort. Sandburg also opts into the voluntary framework of accountability (VFA) and submit data to the National Student Clearinghouse.

The college tracks myriad other student performance outcomes metrics across departments and student services. TRIO programs program-specific student outcomes data annually for program participants. The Career and Technical Education (CTE) team maintains outcomes data for Perkins V-funded programs and reports on Perkins V outcomes annually. Health and Life Science programs (HLP) report specific student outcomes to their third-party accreditors in annual reports. Together, these reporting mechanisms ensure that Carl Sandburg College has the data infrastructure necessary to benchmark performance, identify gaps, and drive sustained improvement in student success.

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Criterion 3 - Summary

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness in fulfilling its mission. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

Argument

Since 2021, Sandburg has made significant advances in student support infrastructure, program quality, and assessment practices. Student services have expanded to address barriers in the rural district, including increased access to financial aid support, mental healthcare, transportation assistance, and basic needs resources. Professional development opportunities and instructional technology investments have also been strengthened to support teaching effectiveness.

Academic programming has continued to align with workforce and transfer needs, supported by advisory input, curriculum review, and dual credit expansion. Sandburg has introduced new pathways designed to connect adult learners with credential attainment in less time, such as the Charge Forward and non-credit Community Health Worker programs. The college has also redesigned transfer pathways to reduce student cost to completion of a four-year degree, aligned with regional workforce needs in early childhood education and engineering, and with student support needs for those who utilize English as a second language.

Notable progress has been made since 2021 in the development of a more formalized assessment infrastructure. Progress includes revised program learning outcomes (PLOs), a structured general education outcomes (GEO) assessment process, a formalized cocurricular assessment process, and faculty-led oversight through assessment committees. While assessment participation and processes have improved, Sandburg remains committed to continuous improvement, with ongoing work to ensure consistent faculty engagement and broader use of direct measures of student learning.

Sources

There are no sources.

4 - Sustainability: Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

The institution's resources, structures, policies, procedures and planning enable it to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational programs, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

4.A Effective Administrative Structures

The institution's administrative structures are effective and facilitate collaborative processes such as shared governance; data-informed decision making; and engagement with internal and external constituencies as appropriate.

Argument

Carl Sandburg College demonstrates that its administrative structures are not merely functional hierarchies, but active mechanisms of collaboration, transparency, and mission fulfillment. Across its governance processes, data practices, and committee structures, the college engages faculty, staff, students, and community partners in ways that are purposeful, evidence-based, and aligned with its 2024-2029 Strategic Plan. The strategies and outcomes described in that plan, particularly those addressing sustainability and excellence, community collaboration, and a culture of continuous learning, provide the institutional framework within which the practices described in this argument operate. These are not aspirational commitments, but practiced realities documented across the college.

Carl Sandburg College's administrative structure is designed to connect the work of individual departments directly to the direction provided by its publicly elected board of trustees and to the goals articulated in its strategic plan. The college's leadership team, known as the president's cabinet, is organized to ensure clear lines of authority, broad institutional coverage, and consistent alignment between day-to-day operations and long-range planning.

The president serves as the chief executive officer of the college district, with responsibility for formulating recommended policies for board consideration, implementing approved policies, leading current and long-range planning, developing an effective administrative and academic organization, and managing institutional resources. Reporting to the president, the cabinet includes:

- Vice President of Academic Services
- Vice President of Student Development
- Vice President of Institutional Resources
- Vice President of Business and Finance
- Vice President of Advancement

Executive Director of Marketing

This structure ensures that academic quality, student support, financial stewardship, external engagement, and institutional communication each receive dedicated senior leadership attention. The breadth of the cabinet reflects the college's recognition that mission fulfillment requires coordinated effort across all institutional functions, a principle embedded in Strategic Plan Outcome D.1, which calls for amplifying institutional standards and practices to streamline internal and external communication across the college.

The board of trustees provides governing oversight and strategic direction for the college, and institutional leadership actively supports board effectiveness through structured and transparent communication. The Illinois Community College Trustee Association (ICCTA) provides mandatory training in which all college Trustees participate, and the board participates in regular state meetings. The board also participates in planning retreats alongside members of college leadership, ensuring that governance and administration are aligned in their understanding of institutional priorities and direction. Board members also participate in dinner and panel presentations on leadership at the college's Leadership Academy, deepening their engagement with the college community they serve.

Institutional leadership provides a monthly college community update to the board, establishing a regular reporting cadence that links the work of individual departments to institutional direction. Department updates are compiled into board reports that are also shared publicly, reinforcing the college's commitment to open communication and accountability. This practice directly reflects Strategic Plan Outcome D.1, which commits the institution to providing targeted and timely communication and establishing methods that promote the free exchange of ideas from stakeholders.

The effectiveness of Sandburg's administrative leadership is further demonstrated through its engagement with a comprehensive network of external accountability structures. The college reports to and maintains compliance with the United States Department of Education, the Higher Learning Commission, the Illinois Board of Higher Education, the Illinois Community College Board, the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, the Governmental Accounting Standards Board and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission. This breadth of regulatory engagement requires organized, well-functioning administrative systems capable of accurate and timely reporting across multiple frameworks.

In 2023, Carl Sandburg College received a five-year recognition from the Illinois Community College Board, reflecting sustained institutional performance and compliance. Several programs maintain independent accreditation through specialized bodies, including the American Board of Funeral Service Education, the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (for both LPN and PN programs), the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs for Medical Assisting, and the Commission on Dental Accreditation. The college's management of this range of accreditation relationships requires coordinated administrative effort and demonstrates that its leadership structures are capable of meeting diverse external standards simultaneously.

Beyond compliance, Sandburg is committed to sharing resources and experiences through participation in a broad range of external memberships and partnerships, an expression of Strategic Plan Outcome C.1, which calls for broadening dynamic connections with external stakeholders, including employers, community members, K-12 programs, four-year institutions, and workforce-based organizations. Examples of actions that support this commitment include participation in external organizations, hosting of events on and off campus, serving as guest

speakers, and facilitators.

The effectiveness of Sandburg’s administrative structures is perhaps most visible in the range and quality of improvements the college has achieved. These initiatives, spanning facilities, programs, student services and technology, reflect an administration capable of facilitating meaningful, mission-aligned change and data-driven decisions across the institution. The Charge Forward program was developed to better serve adult learners by repackaging existing course offerings into accessible pathways, a direct reflection of Strategic Plan Outcome A.4, which calls for expanding efforts to provide financial and academic support for students. The construction of the new Science and Technology Center created modern teaching and learning spaces that enhance academic quality in alignment with Strategic Plan Outcome D.5, which commits the institution to maintaining and expanding high-quality facilities as determined by institutional need. The renovation of the Student Development Center and the student-led redesign of the campus café space, facilitated by the Student Government Association, demonstrate student-centered administrative decision making aligned with Strategic Plan Outcome A.3, which calls for implementing strategies as determined by students’ voices. Additional improvements including an IT infrastructure reboot, shop space renovations, the shift to internal operations for the campus café and spirit shop, the establishment of the Tools of the Trade student grant program , and expanded partnerships through Common App (p.323) and ReUp collectively demonstrate an administration that is responsive, creative and effective in advancing its mission.

The institution’s administration uses data to reach informed decisions in the best interests of the institution and its constituents.

Carl Sandburg College has cultivated a broad and embedded culture of data-informed decision making. The college’s 2024-2029 Strategic Plan explicitly elevates this practice as an institutional priority: Outcome D.2.3 commits the institution to advancing the use of data in the institutional culture for decision-making, and Outcome D.2.4 calls for providing centralized access to data and student success strategies. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness operationalizes these commitments at the staffing and systems level, with dedicated personnel responsible for data reporting, institutional research, accreditation and planning, all in direct service of data-driven institutional management. The Business Office provides financial data to support comprehensive decision-making.

Data is made broadly accessible to support decision making across the college. Weekly enrollment dashboards are distributed to provide timely awareness of enrollment trends. The Institutional Effectiveness page on the college website publishes institutional statistics, full-time and comprehensive student body data, fiscal year information, and an institutional summary, making key data points transparent to internal stakeholders, the board, and the public. Budget managers have access to on-demand financial data through Colleague's self-service function. The implementation of Ramp, an all-in-one financial operations platform that combines corporate cards, payments, vendor management, procurement, travel booking, and automated bookkeeping, enables easy access to financial data and strategic financial planning. This accessibility reflects Strategic Plan Outcome D.2.4’s call for centralized data access and supports the kind of widespread data engagement evident across the college’s departments.

Across academic and student services departments, data use is active, specific and directly connected to decision making. Faculty and staff routinely draw on multiple sources of student success data, such

as final grade distribution reports, program enrollment trends, enrollment figures by credit hours and program, student retention rates , and weekly enrollment dashboards to monitor student progress and guide programmatic decisions. The use of General Education Outcome (GEO) data provides a particularly strong example of data-driven quality improvement. As discussed in Criterion 3, GEO data is tracked and analyzed to assess student attainment of the college's core educational outcomes in communication, critical thinking, cultural diversity, information technology and quantitative skills.

The institution's administration ensures that faculty and, when appropriate, staff and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy and processes through effective collaborative structures.

Carl Sandburg College demonstrates a deep, operationalized commitment to shared governance, in which faculty, staff, students, and external stakeholders participate meaningfully in decisions that shape the institution's academic requirements, policies, and processes. This commitment is embedded in the college's 2024 -2029 Strategic Plan, which calls for establishing communication methods that promote the free exchange of ideas from stakeholders (Outcome D.1.3), advancing connections between students and personnel (Outcome A.3.2), and championing engagement with external partners and stakeholders (Outcome A.1.5). The governance structures described below are the institutional mechanisms through which these strategic commitments are fulfilled.

Student success is the institution's core mission, and student voice is correspondingly embedded in its governance structures. A student, elected by peers, serves as a voting member of the board of trustees (p.4), a direct and formal mechanism for student participation at the highest level of institutional decision-making. Students are routinely called upon to provide feedback and guidance on institutional priorities and student needs. The college's equity plan was developed using a student-focused survey instrument, ensuring that equity goals reflect students' actual experiences.

During the integrated planning and design phases of the Science & Technology Center and the Student Development Center remodel, students were active, highly participatory stakeholders. One notable example of student-led shared governance is the redesign of the campus café and connection space. The Student Government Association facilitated the planning, design, funding and execution of the project, making students not just consulted parties but the driving agents of a significant institutional improvement. This example reflects Strategic Plan Outcome A.3.1, which calls for building student support structures that respond to individual needs while maintaining quality, and Outcome A.5.2, which calls for initiating avenues that provide the sharing and accessibility of resources and best practices across departments.

Faculty participation in governance (p.22) is a core responsibility and a fundamental expression of shared governance at Sandburg. The college maintains 11 faculty committees that provide guidance on processes and functions impacting the overall college experience. Of these, seven are composed of both faculty and staff, with all members holding full voting rights. This structure ensures that collaborative decision making is not merely advisory but carries genuine institutional weight.

A faculty representative serves as a non-binding member of the board of trustees (p.22), providing a formal mechanism for faculty voice in board deliberations. The representative advocates on behalf of faculty colleagues and delivers a verbal report at each board meeting, ensuring consistent and regular communication between the faculty and the institution's governing body . The curriculum committee and faculty assembly provide additional forums for faculty governance over academic requirements and policies, ensuring that those most directly engaged in teaching and learning have structured authority over academic matters. One key example is faculty assembly vote (p.14) on curriculum

committee recommendations. To further expand shared governance, beginning in fall 2026, a faculty and staff committee on employee insurance coverage will be established to expand shared knowledge and increase communication on matters affecting employee well-being.

The Sandburg Foundation models shared governance through its scholarship and Innovation Grant evaluation processes. Faculty, staff, Foundation and college board members, and community partners participate together in evaluating scholarship applications and grant proposals, making decisions that directly advance student success. This inclusive approach engages a diverse, mission-driven group of stakeholders in transparent, collective decision making, reflecting Strategic Plan Outcome C.1, which calls for broadening dynamic connections with external stakeholders, and Outcome C.2, which commits the college to partnering with community members and workforce-based organizations to foster innovation and meet community-specific needs.

Career and Technical Education programs at Sandburg maintain active program advisory boards that include employers, industry professionals and community members. These boards are used to help set departmental priorities, review curriculum relevance and ensure alignment between program offerings and regional workforce needs. This practice directly fulfills Strategic Plan Outcome B.1.4, which calls for developing and cultivating industry-specific partnerships to ensure high-quality curricula, and Outcome C.2.1, which commits the college to partnering with employers and workforce-based organizations to meet community-specific workforce needs and promote regional economic development

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4.B Resource Base and Sustainability

The institution's financial and personnel resources effectively support its current operations. The institution's financial management balances short-term needs with long-term commitments and ensures its ongoing sustainability.

Argument

Collaborative structures at Sandburg extend into the processes by which resources are requested, allocated, and evaluated. College leadership reviews the budget process annually and proactively adjusts processes and updates as needed. The annual budget request process requires written justification for new funding requests, ensuring that departmental leaders articulate and document their priorities in a structured, transparent manner. The capital committee oversees major facilities investments, and the RAMP (Revolving Advance Maintenance Program) process provides a structured mechanism for stakeholder input on facilities planning and maintenance priorities. The college's master plan establishes long-range direction for physical infrastructure, with a competitive solicitation platform formalizing competitive processes for significant institutional purchases and investments. These processes collectively ensure that resource decisions are made collaboratively and transparently, and aligned with Strategic Plan Outcome D.4, which commits the institution to the innovative and responsible use of resources.

Carl Sandburg College maintains a resource base that supports current operations across its Galesburg and Carthage campuses, serving all or part of 10 counties in western Illinois. Highlighting Sandburg's commitment to the mission and to the sustainable, intentional use of resources, a section of the strategic plan, D. Sustainability and Excellence, assures the responsible and innovative use of capital while supporting growth through external sources. The following financial data is drawn from the FY 2025 audited financial statements (year-end June 30, 2025) and the FY 2026 Educational & Financial Plan. Sandburg is well placed to continue growth via bond issuance with favorable Moody's and S&P ratings, demonstrating the college's financial stewardship and projected asset growth.

Resource Base

Total Financial Resources

As of June 30, 2025, the college's total net position was \$ 58,657,626, an increase of \$5,093,555, or 9%, over the prior year restated balance of \$53,564,071. This represents the eighth consecutive year of net position growth, rising 192% from \$20,070,491 in FY 2016.

Net position component	June 30, 2025	June 30, 2024 (restated)	Change
Net investment in capital assets	\$17,658,499	\$7,834,607	+\$9,823,892
Restricted – debt service	\$280,500	\$279,781	+\$719
Restricted – grants & scholarships	\$1,784,861	\$2,000,121	(–\$215,260)
Restricted – working cash	\$9,226,286	\$8,891,103	+\$335,183
Restricted – capital projects	\$3,841,122	\$6,449,880	(–\$2,608,758)
Restricted – audit & liability protection	\$5,577,799	\$4,973,655	+\$604,144
Unrestricted	\$20,288,559	\$23,134,924	(–\$2,846,365)
Total net position	\$58,657,626	\$53,564,071	+\$5,093,555

Total assets grew to \$117,763,837, driven by a \$10.7 million net increase in capital assets following completion of the Science & Technology Center and Student Development Center renovation. Total liabilities were \$37,744,465. Bonds payable net balance: \$25,896,852 noncurrent + \$3,661,381 current = \$29,558,233 total.

Operating Revenue

Under GASB standards for public colleges, property taxes and state/federal appropriations are classified as non-operating revenues. FY 2025 operating revenues, tuition and auxiliary funds, totaled \$4,682,787, 13% of total revenues. All-sources total was \$35,869,771.

Revenue source	FY 2025 actual	FY 2024 actual (restated)	Change
Student tuition & fees (net of scholarship allowance)	\$4,462,476	\$4,309,978	+\$152,498
Auxiliary enterprises revenue	\$220,311	\$196,965	+\$23,346
Total operating revenues	\$4,682,787	\$4,506,943	+\$175,844
Property taxes	\$15,173,979	\$13,734,981	+\$1,438,998
Replacement taxes (CPPRT)	\$369,978	\$551,732	(–\$181,754)
Other state sources	\$4,077,237	\$3,911,728	+\$165,509
On-behalf payments (SURS/CIP)	\$3,417,037	\$3,282,976	+\$134,061
Federal government grants	\$5,262,802	\$4,813,008	+\$449,794
Investment income	\$3,266,355	\$3,421,714	(–\$155,359)
Other non-operating	\$294,976	\$414,628	(–\$119,652)
Total non-operating revenues	\$31,186,984	\$29,475,006	+\$1,711,978
TOTAL ALL REVENUES	\$35,869,771	\$33,981,949	+\$1,887,822

Operating fund revenues per Uniform Financial Statement #3 (p.119): Education Fund \$14,546,040 + O&M Fund \$1,982,749 = \$16,528,789. This is the basis used for ICCB reporting and budget comparisons.

Operating Expenses

FY 2025 total operating expenses (GASB basis) were \$30,776,216, an increase of 19% over the prior year. The largest single driver was a \$2.3 million increase in institutional support, largely attributable to restricted-purpose funds. Depreciation increased \$710,000 as the new Science & Technology Center was placed in service.

Expense category	FY 2025 actual	FY 2024 actual	FY 2023 actual
Instruction	\$8,350,073	\$8,189,353	\$6,835,861
Academic support	\$489,690	\$464,928	\$401,069
Student services	\$4,073,333	\$4,049,758	\$4,153,088
Public services	\$291,585	\$127,413	\$145,850
Auxiliary services	\$1,076,433	\$1,028,223	\$1,005,228
Operations & maintenance of plant	\$1,736,390	\$1,483,808	\$1,317,143
Institutional support	\$8,873,651	\$6,574,997	\$5,953,088
Scholarships, grants & waivers	\$3,376,381	\$3,050,657	\$3,148,966
Depreciation & amortization	\$2,508,680	\$1,798,097	\$1,770,780
Total operating expenses	\$30,776,216	\$26,767,234	\$24,731,073

Sandburg's FY25 operating fund revenues per Uniform Financial Statement #3 (p.119) were \$16,528,789. This calculation, as determined by the Illinois Community College Board, combines the education fund and the operations and maintenance fund. Per the FY 25 audit, the educational fund revenues were \$14,546,040, and the O&M Fund was \$1,982,749. The following depicts the amount and percentage of the operating fund expenditures by object:

- Salaries: \$9,582,653 (58.4%)
- Employee benefits: \$1,744,339 (10.6%)
- Contractual services: \$910,509 (5.5%)
- Utilities: \$772,505 (4.7%)
- Materials & supplies: \$849,655 (5.2%)
- Capital outlay: \$521,734 (3.2%)
- Other (primarily student tuition waivers and discounts): \$2,023,708 (12.3%)

The college's net position has grown every year since FY 2017, rising from \$13.9 million to \$58.7 million, resulting in a 322% increase over eight years. It is important to note that federal COVID relief in FY 2020, FY 2021, and FY 2022 is included as a key driver in the trend data.

All-funds summary (modified accrual, Uniform Financial Statement #1 (p.117):

- Total FY 2025 revenues across all funds: \$38,653,034

- Total FY 2025 expenditures across all funds: \$49,298,559
The total includes \$11.6M bond-funded capital construction.
- Ending all-funds fund balance: \$49,026,642
- Beginning fund balance: \$55,170,584
The decrease reflects expenditure of bond proceeds for the construction of new facilities and the renovation of existing facilities in conjunction with the facilities master plan.

Impact of strategic budgeting on students

Sandburg is District #518 in the Illinois Community College system. The ICCB publishes an annual Summary Profile of all 48 Illinois public community college districts, enabling standardized peer comparisons. Sandburg is classified as a small, non-metropolitan college serving a multi-county rural and small-city district. Other community colleges in this peer group include John Wood, Spoon River College, Shawnee Community College, and Southeastern Community College (p.9). Understanding that student access at small, rural colleges is paramount to success, Sandburg focuses its efforts on retention, persistence, and completion, guided by the strategic plan, to expand financial support for a diverse student population.

The board of trustees approved a \$3-per-credit-hour increase for FY 2026 (p.228). Sandburg’s tuition remains competitive with both state and peer averages, preserving affordability while supporting fiscal stability.

Rate category	FY 2025 actual	FY 2026 approved
In-district tuition	\$178/credit hour	\$181/credit hour
Out-of-district tuition	\$265/credit hour	\$268/credit hour
Out-of-state/international	\$300/credit hour	\$303/credit hour
Online tuition	\$178/credit hour	\$181/credit hour
Registration fee	\$35/semester	\$35/semester

FY 2025 audited tuition and fees revenue (Education + O&M): \$6,477,379. Student tuition receivables net of allowance at June 30, 2025: \$644,994. The measured increase reflects Sandburg’s strategic plan outcome of D.4.1, maintaining a sustainable budget while keeping costs competitive for students.

Program and course fees vary by program and are being reviewed to more accurately reflect actual delivery costs, particularly for high-cost health professions and career/technical programs. Focusing on Sandburg’s strategic plan outcome B.1.4, fee structures reflect investments in program quality that develop and cultivate industry-specific partnerships and ensure high-quality curricula. FY 2025 auxiliary enterprises revenue was \$370,944; the Auxiliary Fund ended FY 2025 at \$588,940, up from \$446,082 (p.115).

Reserve Strategies

The college employs deliberate, board-approved reserve strategies that connect financial stewardship to strategic capital and programmatic investment. This process is guided by Sandburg’s strategic plan outcomes D.4 and D.5, assuring the innovative use of resources and the expansion of high-quality infrastructure. Reserve levels are monitored continuously and reported to the board quarterly.

Certain fund balances are being intentionally reduced to deploy resources toward capital construction, technology and programmatic priorities. Fund balances as of June 30, 2025 (audited, per Uniform Financial Statement #1(p.115)):

Fund	Balance July 1, 2024	Net FY 2025 activity	Balance June 30, 2025	FY 2026 direction
Education Fund	\$15,642,914	(-\$141,826)	\$15,501,088	Stable; slight deficit budgeted
O&M Fund	\$4,588,503	(-\$91,077)	\$4,497,426	Intentional draw-down ~\$500K
O&M Restricted Fund	\$413,597	+\$826,931	\$1,240,528	PHS project deployment
Bond & Interest Fund	\$279,781	+\$719	\$280,500	Stable; levy-supported
Auxiliary Enterprises Fund	\$446,082	+\$142,858	\$588,940	Growing; tuition reallocation
Restricted Purposes Fund	\$2,000,121	(-\$1,430,773)	\$569,348	Intentional reduction
Working Cash Fund	\$8,891,103	+\$335,183	\$9,226,286	Stable
Audit Fund	\$75,029	+\$62,577	\$137,606	Surplus from levy growth
Liability, Protection & Settlement	\$4,898,626	+\$541,567	\$5,440,193	Growing; insurance costs
Building Bond Proceeds Fund	\$10,039,744	(-\$6,944,167)	\$3,095,577	Bond deployment; Charger Ctr
STEF Endowment Fund	\$6,722,797	+\$505,219	\$7,228,016	Investment earnings deployed
SILO Quasi-Endowment Fund	\$1,172,287	+\$48,847	\$1,221,134	Instructional opportunity fund
TOTAL ALL FUNDS	\$55,170,584	(-\$6,143,942)	\$49,026,642	Planned reduction per capital plan

The \$6.1 million overall reduction in combined fund balance reflects the intentional and planned deployment of bond proceeds toward capital construction, not operational stress. Seven of 12 funds ended in FY 2025 with positive changes, and six are budgeted to be balanced or surplus in FY 2026.

Capital Development Committee

A committee was formed in FY 2026 to address reserve deductions through a holistic, efficient lens. Chaired by the CFO, the committee includes representatives from academic affairs, student development, physical plant, IT and cabinet members, ensuring cross-departmental contributions. Capital investment decisions are guided by a multi-year Capital Projects Budget approved by the

board of trustees. The five-year plan (FY 2025-FY 2029) totals \$72.56 million:

Capital category	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028–29	Five-year total
Bond projects	\$12,000,000	\$4,000,000	\$50,000,000	—	\$66,000,000
PHS projects	\$1,125,000	\$1,675,000	\$425,000	\$725,000	\$3,950,000
Local & other sources	\$710,125	\$700,000	\$400,000	\$800,000	\$2,610,125
Total	\$13,835,125	\$6,375,000	\$50,825,000	\$1,525,000	\$72,560,125

FY 2025 audited capital additions totaled \$13,274,999 in new assets, with net capital assets growing \$10.76 million after depreciation, confirming that the FY 2025 capital plan was executed as approved (p.118).

Capital Construction

Science & Technology Center

Sandburg understood that the face of education had changed; therefore, the facilities needed to be upgraded. To meet this need and address aging infrastructure, the college elected to act on the campus master plan's insights in alignment with the strategic plan for future growth, and to build the Science & Technology Center. Following a 2021 bond series, the college broke ground on the two-story, 42,165-square-foot building that houses health professions programs and natural sciences. President Dr. Reilly referred to the building as a step forward in preparing our students for high-demand positions in the health care industry. The building opened in fall 2024 and continues to expand the growth of our students.

Relocation and Upgrade to the Automotive Program

An opportunity to relocate and update the automotive program was included in the construction of the Science & Technology Center. Using funds from the bond issuance, the program was relocated to building G, which houses other career and technical programs. In conjunction with industry partners, the program location was redesigned with updated equipment and a highly engaging instructional space. Strategic alignment for this move includes C.2.1, “partner with employers to foster innovation and meet community-specific workforce needs,” and B.1.5, “implement student experiences that result in greater opportunities for career exploration and employment.”

Remodel of Student Development Center

Included in the 2021 bond issuance was the renovation of the Student Development Center. Envisioning a student center that brought student-centric services into one destination that evoked a sense of belonging was the driving force behind the remodel. To re-establish the "front door" of the college, \$5 million allocated in the five-year capital plan. Completed in 2025, the Student Development Center embodies the college's strategic plan outcome of A.1.3, “provide environments for students that nurture engagement.” Student support services now located together in the Student Development Center.

Renovation of the Carthage Campus Science Laboratory

Expansion is not only occurring at Sandburg's main campus. The Carthage campus is experiencing growth through the establishment of an on-site nursing program, launched in FY 2025. A laboratory remodel to support expanded health professions programming occurred in 2024. The Sandburg

Foundation provided \$293,774 to support the overhaul of the existing lab space. The partnership shared between the college and foundation continues to impact student success.

Capital Projects in Development

Charger Center

As part of Sandburg's broader vision, a new multi-purpose athletic and event facility is under development on the college's main campus. The Charger Center will support and expand college athletics while providing opportunities for large-scale conferences and events. The building will accommodate a 3,000-seat graduation ceremony in a multi-court gymnasium and will include multi-purpose courts and conference space, turf training, cardio and weight areas, a fitness center, locker rooms and a fitness studio. A site suitability analysis (Farnsworth Group, September 2024) confirmed no infrastructure concerns: water service will connect to the existing 8" campus water main loop, sanitary sewer will tie to the Log City Trail main, and electrical service will be sourced from the existing Ameren loop feed.

518 Collective

Sandburg was awarded a \$1.8 million DCEO grant in 2025 to create an Agricultural Technology Incubator. With support the Sandburg Foundation and additional institutional dollars, the 518 Collective will house physical workspace, workforce training space, community connectivity, and mentorship for entrepreneurs and organizations focused on agriculture. Design has begun, and the Sandburg hopes to open the 518 Collective in 2026.

Budgeting

The college's budget process is designed to be transparent, data-driven and strategically aligned. The FY 2025 audit reaffirmed HLC's FY 2021 finding that fiscal management is a strong institutional asset. The process also supports the college's strategic plan outcome of sustainability and excellence.

Carl Sandburg College prepares its annual budget in compliance with:

- Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) applicable to government units and Illinois community colleges
- Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) requirements
- Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) Fiscal Management Manual financial reporting requirements
- Higher Learning Commission (HLC) assumed practices and criteria for accreditation

The college uses fund-based accounting with the modified accrual basis for governmental funds and accrual basis for the permanent fund. Individual budgets are prepared for each of the 12 funds.

Financial policies are published on the College's website and include:

- Policy 2.5 (p.80)
- Policy 2.9 (p.42)
- Policy 2.18 (p.49)
- 2.51–2.57 (p.81)

Changes to Budget Process to Increase Transparency and Understanding

The FY 2026 budget introduced structural changes to improve transparency and accountability, directly supporting Strategic Plan Goal D.1 "promote an environment of understanding between

Sandburg and its stakeholders” and D.2.4 “provide centralized access for data and student success strategies”:

- Interfund transfers eliminated: expenditures now budgeted directly within individual funds, removing a layer of complexity that previously obscured true cost attribution by department and function
- Student tuition and fees allocation shifted from O&M Fund to Auxiliary Fund, clarifying operating fund composition and supporting cleaner ICCB reporting
- Seven of 12 funds budgeted with balanced or surplus results; intentional deficits limited to bond fund deployment and strategic reserve reduction
- Budget-to-actual variance reports reviewed quarterly, beginning with Q1 in October

Moved to Zero-based Budgeting

The budget development process connects departmental requests directly to strategic outcomes, supporting Strategic Plan Goal D.2.3 “advance the use of data in the institutional culture for decision-making”:

- Annual budget training provided to all employees involved in development
- Self-service budgeting tool provides historical line-item data for manager reference
- CFO and business office lead and administer the process

Change in Budget Timeline

Following a review of the budget process, Sandburg implemented a revised budget timeline. As documented below, the timeline corresponds with compliance milestones and institutional targets while increasing transparency and strategic alignment. Training was provided to managers on budget process updates and timeline.

Strategic Plan and the Budget

Strategic plan pillar	Primary budget connection	<u>FY 2026 key investment</u>
A. Student access & success	Student services, financial aid, recruitment/retention, scholarships	Student services: \$4,254,890; scholarships/waivers: \$4,661,388
B. Teaching & learning	Instruction, faculty, academic technology, curriculum development	Instruction: \$8,324,702; faculty FTE up 5%; IT services +30.2%
C. Community collaboration	Public services, community ed, Carthage campus, workforce programs	Public services: \$234,907; Carthage expansion; nursing program
D. Sustainability & excellence	Institutional support, facilities, reserves, risk management	Capital plan: \$6.375M; Charger Ctr: \$4.25M; insurance review
E. Culture of continuous learning	Professional development, training budgets, employee programs	SEA contract; benefits investment; budget manager training

Technology

Technology investment is a strategic priority, supported by dedicated endowment funding, an operating budget increase and direct alignment with multiple strategic plan goals.

Fund/source	FY 2025 audited balance	FY 2026 budget/purpose
STEF – Strategic Technology Endowment Fund	\$7,228,016	\$255,000 deployed for district-wide technology enhancement
SILO Quasi-Endowment (Sandburg Initiates Life-Changing Opportunities)	\$1,221,134	\$25,000 for instructional equipment and programs
Operating fund contractual services (IT-related)	~\$910,509 (FY 2025 actual)	30.2% increase budgeted FY 2026; IT centralization & subscriptions
Information Technology Refresh (capital)	\$250,000 deployed (FY 2025)	\$200,000 FY 2026; \$200,000/yr. FY 2027–29 in capital plan

The STEF fund, established from working cash transfers, generates ongoing investment income. Its balance grew to \$7,228,016 in FY 2025 (up from \$6,722,797 pg.117), providing a substantial long-term reserve for technology investment that does not require recurring operating budget increases.

New software implementations in FY 2025-FY 2026, supported through the contractual services budget increase:

System/project	Type/owner	Purpose/description	Status/notes
Transact	Campus ID / payment platform (Business Office / IT)	Manages student payments, point-of-sale transactions and financial integrations to improve efficiency and reporting.	Active
BidNet	Procurement / bidding platform (Business Office)	Supports competitive bidding, vendor communication and purchasing transparency. Aligns with Policy 2.9 Campus Solicitation/ Purchasing.	Active
Prophix	Budgeting & financial planning (Finance)	Enables budgeting, forecasting and financial reporting to support strategic planning and decision-making.	Active
Ramp	AP / expense management (Finance)	Streamlines purchasing, invoice processing, approvals and financial visibility across departments.	Active
VMware 8 Migration	Infrastructure upgrade (IT)	Upgrades virtual server environments to improve performance, security and vendor support compliance.	Active
Canvas	Learning management system (Academic Services / IT)	Supports course delivery (online, hybrid, in-person), student engagement and instructional continuity.	Active
Checkpoint to SentinelOne	Endpoint security transition (IT)	Enhance threat detection, response and endpoint visibility.	Active
BloodHound / SoundHound	Security / analytics tools (IT)	Security monitoring	Active
DUO	Security initiative (IT)	Adds a second layer of authentication to protect user accounts and reduce risk of unauthorized access.	Active (Students Complete)
SaferWatch	Campus safety platform (Campus Safety / IT)	Provides emergency alerts, incident reporting and real-time communication to enhance campus safety.	In Progress
SmartDeploy	Imaging / deployment platform (IT)	Standardizes and automates device imaging and	Active

Implementations support D.5.2 “Leverage accessible and innovative technology that enables safe, sustainable, and efficient operations” and Strategic Plan Priority A.6.1 “Utilize technology to increase student engagement”

Physical Infrastructure

Sandburg maintains and continually improves the physical infrastructure necessary to provide safe, accessible, reliable, and effective learning, work, and student-support environments. Sandburg’s facilities portfolio includes 13 buildings totaling approximately 321,327 gross square feet. This includes 11 buildings on the main campus in Galesburg, Illinois; one building in downtown Galesburg; and a branch campus facility in Carthage, Illinois. Collectively, these locations encompass approximately 110 acres and are maintained by a Facilities staff of 20 employees.

Physical infrastructure planning is integrated with Sandburg’s strategic, financial, academic, and operational planning processes. Sandburg evaluates facility priorities using building-condition information, deferred-maintenance needs, life-safety and code requirements, accessibility needs, instructional and program needs, enrollment trends, utility consumption, operational reliability, and available financial resources. This process allows Sandburg to prioritize projects that protect students and employees, sustain instructional delivery, reduce avoidable operating costs, and preserve institutional assets.

Sandburg evaluates the effectiveness of its facilities operations and infrastructure investments through measures such as completion of preventive-maintenance activities, work-order response and completion trends, inspection and compliance outcomes, reduction of recurring equipment failures, utility-consumption trends, campus safety records, accessibility improvements, project completion, and stakeholder feedback. Results are used to guide future planning, budgeting, and continuous improvement.

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4.C Planning for Quality Improvement

The institution engages in systematic strategic planning for quality improvement. It relies on data, integrating its insights from enrollment forecasts, financial capacity, student learning assessment, institutional operations and the external environment.

Argument

Carl Sandburg College’s approach to quality improvement is systematic, evidence-based, and deeply integrated across all institutional functions. The college does not approach planning as an annual exercise confined to a single office; rather, planning at Sandburg is a continuous, institution-wide process in which data from enrollment forecasts, financial analysis, student learning assessment, operational performance, and the external environment converge to drive purposeful decision making. The 2024-2029 Strategic Plan provides the organizing framework, Institutional Effectiveness provides the infrastructure, and the college’s governance structures —documented in the companion 4.A argument, provide the collaborative mechanisms through which planning decisions are made and implemented. Together, these elements constitute a mature, functioning quality improvement system that is traceable from institutional strategy to departmental practice to documented outcomes.

The 2024-2029 Strategic Plan is the central architecture for quality improvement at Carl Sandburg College. Developed collaboratively with input from faculty, staff, students, and community stakeholders, and based on an internal SWOT analysis, the plan organizes institutional priorities under five outcome areas that collectively span the full scope of the college’s mission:

Strategic plan pillar	Focus area
A. Student access & success	Equitable access, retention, persistence, completion, financial support
B. Teaching & learning	Program quality, GEO assessment, industry partnerships, curriculum development
C. Community alliances	External stakeholder engagement, workforce partnerships, K-12 and transfer connections
D. Sustainability & excellence	Financial stewardship, data culture, facilities, technology, communication
E. Continuous learning & development	Employee development, competitive compensation, professional growth

Each outcome area contains specific, measurable strategies against which annual progress is tracked, creating a direct line of accountability from institutional aspiration to documented action. Strategic planning is not a standalone activity at Sandburg but an integrated process that connects with budgeting cycles, assessment systems, accreditation obligations and governance structures, embodying Strategic Plan Outcome D.2, which calls for advancing a culture of data use in institutional decision making and attaining integrated problem-solving across all departments.

Annual planning cycles reinforce the strategic framework at the departmental level and connect unit-level work to institutional governance. Faculty and staff across the college submit annual priorities and accomplishment information to leadership, which is compiled and used to inform monthly board of trustees reporting. These monthly updates, publicly available in the board minutes (p.179), create a transparent, ongoing feedback loop between departmental activity, institutional direction and public accountability. This practice directly reflects Strategic Plan Outcome D.1's commitment to providing targeted, timely communication and establishing methods that promote the free exchange of ideas from all stakeholders.

The board participates in annual planning retreats (p.35) with members of the president's cabinet to ensure governance and administration are aligned with institutional priorities. An April board budget workshop includes an explicit review of the proposed budget for alignment with all five strategic plan pillars, ensuring that resource allocation and strategic direction are considered together rather than in parallel. These structures are documented fully in the companion 4.A argument.

Weekly enrollment dashboards are distributed across the institution, providing timely awareness of enrollment patterns at the course, program, and institutional level. These dashboards are supplemented by program enrollment trend data, enrollment figures by credit hour and program type, student cohort tracking, and IPEDS data that situates the college's enrollment profile within state and national benchmarks. Success rates by program, prefix, and course provide a disaggregated view that enables targeted academic and advising interventions. Student Planner and Who's Next, tools used in student development, support both direct student engagement and institutional data collection, enabling tracking of student progress, appointment patterns and service utilization across the enrollment pipeline.

The opening of the Science & Technology Center in fall 2024 is the clearest example of enrollment-driven capital investment. Built in direct response to enrollment growth in health professions and STEM programs, the two-story facility expanded the college's capacity to serve students seeking credentials in high-demand fields, reflecting Strategic Plan Outcome D.5.1's commitment to maintaining and expanding high-quality facilities as determined by institutional need. The Charge Forward program, which repackaged existing course offerings into accessible pathways specifically designed for adult learners, demonstrates enrollment-responsive program development aligned with Strategic Plan Outcome A.4's call for expanding financial and academic support for students.

Additional enrollment access initiatives developed from data and analysis of the external environment include Common App and ReUp partnerships to broaden application pathways, a one-click admit process to reduce enrollment barriers, and expanded dual credit programs to strengthen the K-12 enrollment pipeline. The launch of an on-site nursing program at the Carthage campus in FY25 directly addresses enrollment access gaps in Hancock County and surrounding areas, reflecting Strategic Plan Outcome C.1.1's call to increase educational opportunities through off-site and partner locations throughout the district. Each of these initiatives is traceable to enrollment data, demographic analysis, or an assessment of the external environment.

Sandburg's quality improvement planning rests on a strategically managed and consistently strengthened financial foundation. The college's financial capacity is not merely a backdrop to planning; it is an active input to it. Understanding what the institution can sustain, invest, and build is integral to the college's ability to translate strategic priorities into real programs, facilities, and services.

The annual budget process at Sandburg is structured to ensure that financial planning and strategic

planning are inseparable. Each department's lead representative develops budgets consistent with department goals and college-wide strategic outcomes, with written justification required for all new funding requests. Annual budget manager training supports this process. A self-service budgeting tool provides historical line-item data for manager reference, enabling data-informed requests rather than baseline-plus-percentage increases. Quarterly budget-to-actual variance reviews, beginning with Q1 in October, provide structured in-cycle monitoring and course correction.

The FY 2026 budget introduced structural changes specifically designed to improve transparency and align with Strategic Plan Outcome D.1: Interfund transfers were eliminated, so expenditures are now budgeted directly within individual funds, removing complexity that previously obscured true cost attribution by department and function. The April board budget workshop includes an explicit review of all budget priorities against the five strategic plan pillars, ensuring that the annual resource allocation decision is understood as strategic.

The capital development committee, chaired by the chief financial officer and including representatives from academic affairs, student services, physical plant, IT, and the cabinet, provides cross-departmental governance over major capital investments. The college's five-year Capital Projects Budget (p.181), approved by the board of trustees, totals \$72.56 million for FY 2025 through FY 2029 and encompasses bond-funded construction, Protection, Health & Safety projects (p.354), and locally funded improvements. The Master Plan establishes long-range infrastructure direction, and an RFP platform formalizes competitive procurement. Every major reserve deployment decision is explicitly linked to a strategic plan outcome, ensuring that capital investment reflects institutional strategy rather than serving as an independent administrative function.

Student learning assessment, as described in Criterion 3, is a core driver of quality improvement at Carl Sandburg College, and the college has made substantial, documented investments in strengthening its assessment infrastructure. This work has been shaped in part by direct feedback from the Higher Learning Commission and reflects an institutional commitment to moving from classroom-level assessment to a comprehensive, multi-level system that informs program quality and institutional continuous improvement.

Operational planning at Sandburg is integrated, data-informed and structured to connect departmental performance directly to institutional goals. The college does not treat operational management and strategic planning as separate functions; rather, the data generated through daily operations informs planning and the goals established through planning shape operational decisions. Examples of this type of planning include the energy study, implementation of ADP (p.132), business office software upgrades (p.414), and conversion to new a new LMS with anticipated full deployment of FA 2027.

Evidence gathered from faculty and staff across the institution, representing departments including CTE, Institutional Resources, Student Development, Career Development, Admissions, WDCE, Foundation and Alumni Engagement, reveals a broad and specific culture of operational data use. Personnel reports, facility costs, cost-revenue analysis, budget data, contract renewal records, and employee annual review and goal-setting data are all actively consulted in departmental decision-making. Meeting minutes, work orders, and accreditation timeline graphics provide structured tracking of operational commitments and progress.

The breadth and variety of operational quality improvements documented across the college provide concrete evidence that the planning and improvement cycle is functioning as intended. These are not isolated innovations but a pattern of data-informed, mission-aligned improvements across facilities, programs, student services, and technology:

Area	Quality improvement initiative
Academic programming	Charge Forward program for adult learners; dual credit pathway expansion; GED pathways to Sandburg programs; new course supplies vendor; Online course standard adopted based on Quality Matters
Facilities	Science & Technology Center (fall 2024); Student Development Center renovation; CTE space renovation and relocation of automotive program to building G; Carthage campus science laboratory renovation
Student support	Tools of the Trade student grant program; enhanced grant-funded stipends, gas cards and direct assistance; student recognition night
Technology	IT infrastructure reboot; STEF-funded technology enhancements; new software implementations (Transact, BidNet, Student Development platform)
Enrollment access	Common App and ReUp partnerships; One Click Admit; Carthage nursing program (FY 2025)
Operations	Shift to internal operations for campus café and spirit shop; student-led café space redesign; budget process restructuring (zero-based, interfund transfer elimination)
Workforce & culture	Professional development training; wellness committee initiatives; SEA contract negotiations (5% annual increases for five years)

Each initiative in this list is traceable to a data-informed assessment of institutional need and connected to one or more outcomes in the 2024-2029 Strategic Plan. The pattern demonstrates not only that improvements are occurring but that they are systematic —the product of a functioning planning and quality improvement cycle rather than ad hoc responses to isolated problems.

Carl Sandburg College’s planning is explicitly and systematically informed by awareness of the external environment in which it operates. Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs at Sandburg maintain active program advisory boards composed of employers, industry professionals, and community members. These boards are convened regularly to help set departmental priorities, review curriculum for relevance and currency, and ensure alignment between program offerings and regional workforce needs. Advisory meeting insights are used directly to inform planning decisions about program development, equipment investment, and instructional design. This practice fulfills Strategic Plan Outcome B.1.4, which calls for developing and cultivating industry-specific partnerships to ensure high-quality curricula and Outcome C.2.1, which commits the college to partnering with workforce-based organizations to meet community-specific needs and promote regional economic development.

The college’s economic impact report documents Sandburg’s role in the regional economy and informs planning conversations with external stakeholders, including elected officials, employers and community partners. The 518 Collective, a community education initiative supported by a \$1.8 million grant, Sandburg Foundation investment and institutional support, reflects the college’s commitment to

extending its educational impact into the broader community, reflecting Strategic Plan Outcome C.2.2's call for community education and enrichment. The Charger Center, a multi-purpose athletic and event facility under development on the main campus, will expand the college's capacity to serve students, community members, and regional organizations, providing a 3,000-seat venue for graduation and events alongside fitness, athletics, and conference facilities.

Sandburg's planning accounts explicitly for the demographic characteristics and trends of its district. Enrollment data is analyzed by county and geographic area to identify access gaps and inform decisions on program placement and delivery. The launch of the Carthage campus nursing program in FY 2025 directly reflects this analysis. Expanded dual credit programs and K-12 partnerships respond to the college's awareness of its enrollment pipeline and the demographic shifts shaping it. State workforce initiatives position the college within broader regional economic development strategies that extend beyond the district's boundaries.

Leadership at Carl Sandburg College participates actively in external professional organizations at the local, state and national level. Examples of participation in diverse organization include Women's Co-Chair American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions, the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) North Central Board, Illinois Community College Chief Student Service Officers- Vice President, GFOA Distinguished Budget Award reviewer, Illinois Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions- President, Illinois Community College Student Activities Association (ICCSAA) - Treasure 2015 to present, local non-profit and service board members. This engagement brings external perspective and emerging best practices into institutional planning conversations, ensuring that Sandburg's planning is informed not only by internal data but by the broader higher education landscape.

The range and variety of quality improvements documented across the institution, spanning academic programming, student support, facilities, technology, enrollment access and operations, provides the most compelling evidence that Sandburg's planning system is not aspirational but operational. These improvements did not emerge from a single planning effort; they reflect a sustained pattern of data-informed decision making, collaborative planning, resource alignment and deliberate implementation that have been built and refined over time. Sandburg's drive toward quality improvement over the last four years reflects a lived institutional culture of evaluation, improvement, and infrastructure support.

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Criterion 4 - Summary

The institution's resources, structures, policies, procedures and planning enable it to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational programs, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

Argument

Since the 2021 comprehensive review, Sandburg has strengthened institutional effectiveness through improved financial stability, enhanced planning processes, and strategic investment in facilities and infrastructure. The college has demonstrated responsible fiscal management, including stable reserves, strategic budgeting, and continued capital improvements that support learning environments and community engagement.

Planning processes have become more integrated, with the 2024–2029 Strategic Plan aligning operational goals, resource allocation, and student success priorities. Data use has expanded through dashboards, program review processes, and introduction of technical platforms to ensure efficiency, supporting more informed decision-making across divisions. Additionally, Sandburg has demonstrated progress in linking planning to outcomes, particularly in enrollment strategies, student success initiatives, and resource prioritization.

Sources

There are no sources.