



# College Spotlight

Success Strategies from Michigan Community Colleges

Student Success

Talent Development

Community Vitality

## Expanding Access Through Michigan Reconnect

Michigan Reconnect is a program designed to make community college affordable for Michigan residents who have not yet earned their college degrees, providing last-dollar, tuition-free access for in-district students and substantial tuition support for out-of-district students. In fall 2023, the Michigan Legislature temporarily expanded Michigan Reconnect to include students ages 21 to 24. To maximize the impact of this expansion, the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential invested in a variety of interventions across campus offices to enhance direct outreach to eligible students.

At Kirtland Community College, administrators seized this opportunity to implement **IT, marketing, and financial aid** strategies, driving enrollment growth and increasing student engagement.

## Reconnect-Driven Institutional Redesign

Kirtland leveraged intervention funding to build institutional capacity, enhancing its ability to identify and support students through more targeted outreach and innovative integration of student information.

- **IT enhancements.** Kirtland established a structured approach to individualized student outreach. Administrators enrolled students eligible for Reconnect who had not yet applied or completed the process into a designated shell course in their learning management system and then implemented pop-up messaging to those enrolled. Messages to students included step-by-step guidance on completing their Reconnect application and direct links to financial aid resources, keeping them informed and connected to college support services. This intervention specifically targeted students who had completed some coursework but had yet to finish their programs, providing clear, accessible guidance on applying for Reconnect and continuing their studies.
- **Marketing expansion.** To extend its reach beyond campus, Kirtland invested in multichannel marketing efforts—incorporating social media campaigns, streaming commercials, music streaming advertisements, billboards, and direct mailers. These efforts ensured that more potential students in the community were aware of their opportunities to return to school tuition free.
- **Financial aid optimization.** Kirtland also streamlined and enhanced its financial aid processes. The college provided specialized training for financial aid staff on Reconnect policies and hired a financial aid specialist to integrate their enrollment and financial aid systems. This shift from a manual process to a more automated system improved accuracy and efficiency, making it easier for students to access the support they needed to secure necessary financial resources.

“If we can take financial burden away, it is a win-win for everyone.”

— Director of Financial Aid Services

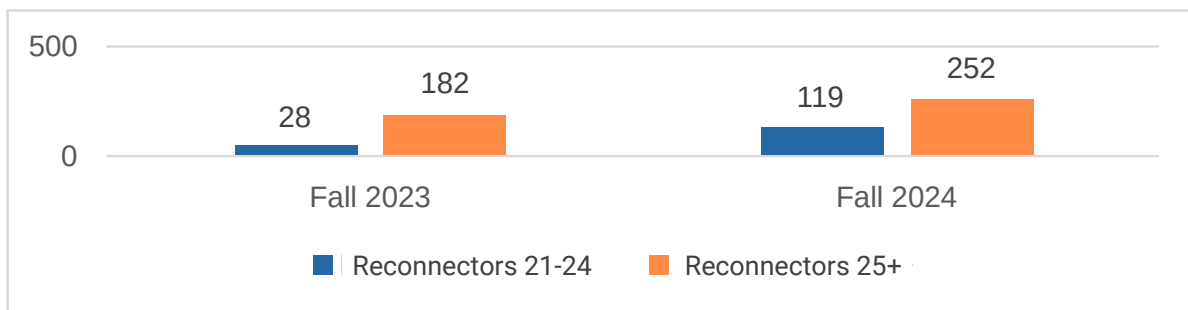
**Michigan Community College Association**

## Outreach and Enrollment Success

Kirtland’s targeted outreach efforts significantly increased program awareness, enrollment, and student success. The college noted over **400,000 impressions** on their streaming ads and an additional **4,000 link clicks** across Kirtland’s social media accounts directing users to the Reconnect landing page. These outreach efforts not only expanded Kirtland’s reach but also led to a measurable increase in enrollment from fall 2023 to fall 2024:

- Enrollment **more than quadrupled** for Reconnectors ages 21 to 24
- Enrollment increased by **nearly 40 percent** for Reconnectors ages 25 and older

Student Enrollment in Reconnect, Fall 2023 and Fall 2024



The program proved especially impactful for students whose college education had been disrupted by COVID-19. Many students had previously been unable to return to school because the original Reconnect age requirement (25+) was still out of reach. Because of the expansion, these students were able to resume their studies and complete their degrees, often sooner than expected, accelerating their path to graduation.

Administrators highlighted particular success among nursing students, many of whom were already working in hospitals as Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), but had hesitated to return due to potential work-hour reductions. By removing tuition barriers, these students were able to advance their education without sacrificing their income.

## A Sustainable Model for Future Success

Kirtland Community College not only expanded access to education through these interventions but also laid the foundation for long-term student support strategies. The funding encouraged administrators to think creatively about targeted interventions and explore ways to apply these approaches to other student groups and future Reconnect initiatives. Moving forward, Kirtland plans to:

- Continue radio ads to promote Reconnect and reach even more prospective students
- Expand outreach to students transitioning from the Futures for Frontliners program
- Implement targeted messaging to support students struggling academically
- Engage parents at financial aid nights, encouraging them to return to school alongside their children

Through these efforts, Kirtland will continue to break down financial and structural barriers to education, ensuring that more students can pursue their goals and build brighter futures.

“The Reconnect program is a lifeline.”  
— Director of Financial Aid Services