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Seattle Colleges Chancellor Announces Retirement

SEATTLE— After 40 years with Seattle Colleges, Chancellor Jill Wakefield has [announced her retirement](#), effective June 2016. She was appointed as chancellor in 2009, becoming the district's first female in that position. When she retires, she will be the longest-serving chancellor in the district's history.



Dr. Wakefield started with the district as a program assistant in the veterans office at South Seattle Community College, then served as public information officer, director of development, vice president for institutional advancement, and vice president for instruction, as well as president from 2003 to 2008. She succeeded Charles Mitchell as chancellor.

"I couldn't be more pleased to have spent my professional career with Seattle Colleges," says Dr. Wakefield. "It has been an honor and a pleasure to represent this great district and its talented educators and staff, and I believe we have a solid foundation in place to educate tomorrow's workforce."

Dr. Wakefield's focus this final year includes:

- Getting more students to the finish line by improving recruitment, retention, and completion.
- Meeting workforce training needs in high-demand areas.
- Continuing to offer high-demand, high-quality transfer programs with clear pathways to universities.
- Establishing sustainable public and private funding sources.
- Ensuring the new Health Education Center in Pacific Tower is fully operational.

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“Dr. Wakefield is one of the most dedicated leaders I have ever worked with,” says Steve Hill, chair of the Seattle Colleges Board of Trustees. “She has led our colleges through some of the most challenging economic times, and she has taken them to a new and important position in the community. Our city—especially our students—has been fortunate to have had this leader for so long.”

A subcommittee of the board will lead the search for a new chancellor.

Local Leaders Reflect on Chancellor Wakefield’s Contributions to Our Community

Seattle Mayor Ed Murray: “Jill Wakefield is an innovator who transformed Seattle Colleges to better educate the workforce of the city. Jill and her team are outstanding partners on a range of joint efforts, from Ready to Work that teaches basic language and job skills to new immigrants, to opening the door for young people to careers in the trades through training and apprenticeships on City construction projects. Over the next year, while we still have her, we’re going to deepen that relationship between the City and the Colleges to advance the cause of higher learning and career development in Seattle.”

Marléna Sessions, CEO of the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County:

“As one of the most nationally well-respected leaders in the college system, Chancellor Wakefield has been a powerful force for improving the lives of students, especially those with barriers. Her pragmatic compassion and get-things-done attitude have been instrumental to the Seattle College District’s immense contribution to the broader community. She will be deeply missed but leaves a lasting legacy of innovation that will serve students and workers for generations to come.”

Larry Nyland, superintendent of Seattle Public Schools: “Dr. Jill Wakefield has been and is an incredible partner to Seattle Public Schools. The work done by Seattle Colleges to extend 13th Year Scholarships to graduating Seattle seniors in high-need areas of the city will transform lives—and our community—for years to come. Hundreds of students have had their lives transformed. Many are the first in their family to attend college. Dr. Wakefield’s “can do” vision for the future engages students, transforms learning and builds better futures. Thank you, Dr. Wakefield.”

Trustee Emeritus Tom Malone, Seattle Colleges: “Jill has been a close friend and colleague for over 20 years. I have watched her superb performance from dean to chancellor. If she has been a good friend to me she has been one of the best friends higher education has ever had. She is smart, fair, strong and progressive. We all will miss her leadership; the only comfort we have is that one of her strongest skills is hiring and mentoring very capable people and she leaves the Seattle Colleges stronger than when she began her career, culminating in a great chancellorship.

Washington State University President Emeritus Sam Smith: "Jill Wakefield is a truly visionary leader who has played a wonderful role in our state and nation's systems of higher education. I have had the pleasure of knowing and working with her for many years and have seen the truly amazing job she has done in first leading South Seattle College and then the Seattle Colleges. She will be greatly missed as she has that rare ability to see the future and then lead others to make that future a positive reality. We must find a way to keep her in this area as she will always be a visionary leader. With higher education going through a period of change, we definitely could use her skills and abilities."

Marty Brown, executive director, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges: “Chancellor Wakefield is a system leader and a crusader for social justice through education. Her retirement will leave a huge void in our state higher education system.”

A Look Back at Chancellor Wakefield's Leadership

By working with faculty, staff, labor and business, Chancellor Wakefield led the district to a number of achievements, including:

- Developing and implementing a districtwide Master Plan.
- Piloting the first applied baccalaureate programs in the country.
- Initiating I-BEST, a nationally recognized model for offering basic and technical education.
- Transforming the Georgetown campus from a collection of World War II Quonset huts to new facilities that meet the needs of business and industry through apprenticeship and customized training programs.

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- Fostering strong partnerships with the city of Seattle, Seattle Public Schools, the Seattle Housing Authority, the Workforce Development Council, the Economic Development Council, our local universities, and numerous businesses and organizations.
- Being recognized nationally as a district for our commitment to equity and social justice.
- Cultivating partnerships for our faculty, staff, and students throughout the world to ensure that our colleges provide a global experience and students are ready to compete in the global market.

High-resolution photos of Chancellor Wakefield are available [here](#).

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About Seattle Colleges

The [Seattle College District](#) is Washington state's largest college district, with nearly 50,000 students enrolled each year. It is composed of Seattle Central College, North Seattle College, South Seattle College, Seattle Vocational Institute, and four specialty centers. The district offers more than 135 workforce education and training programs that lead to bachelor's degrees in high-growth industries, associate degrees in various disciplines, certificates in professional technical programs, and transfer degrees to universities throughout the United States.

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