EXPANDING
Our Vision
FROM THE Chairmen
DAVID MELE, BOARD CHAIR

I am delighted to have the opportunity to chair the board of the ACCESS College Foundation for the next two school years. It was my privilege to lead our Strategic Planning Task Force through the 2018-19 year which led to many of the initiatives we are now pursuing.

Often we talk about the large percentage of ACCESS students who were the “First in the Family” to achieve education and training beyond high school. That resonates so strongly with me because my parents didn’t attend college, and my brother and I were honored to be the first in OUR family. College was transformational. It opened a vast array of opportunities and gave me a window to what was possible – opportunities that I may have otherwise missed.

I know that ACCESS makes a difference for thousands of students just like me. My primary goal for this year is to build upon the tremendous accomplishments of the past 31 years. Specific goals include: 1. Expanding our donor base so we can increase our impact and expand services; 2. Successfully launch the new Western Tidewater project; and 3. Implement the objectives and action steps of our new Strategic Plan ensuring that we meet the metrics we have deemed important for our success.

Join me in impacting this region and its workforce through educational opportunities made possible by ACCESS College Foundation.

-Dave

FROM THE President
BONNIE SUTTON, PRESIDENT & CEO

What an exciting year our 31st school year turned out to be! After all the highlights and special events of our 30th Anniversary year, we were ready to dream big and plan for some very important milestones. Through our refreshed Strategic Plan, we expanded our mission, vision and accomplishments. We also increased our funding relationships, which is allowing us to grow our service area in the 2019-20 school year. In this Annual Report, you will read about the Obici Healthcare Foundation and their funding of our expansion to Western Tidewater in the school districts of Southampton County, Surry County and the City of Franklin. You will also read about the relocation of our headquarters thanks to the generosity of a long-time funding partner.

It takes big dreams and plans to continue serving students in this region. We truly believe that education and training beyond high school not only change the lives of our students and their families, but also the communities we serve by developing an educated, trained workforce right here in Hampton Roads.

As we report on the last school year, we are already off and running on implementing our newest strategies for enhancing what we are doing in 33 public high schools across nine school districts, in 28 select middle schools and on 13 select college campuses. Read about our impact and join us for the journey.

-Bonnie
Expanding Our Mission & Vision

ACCESS expanded its mission and vision statements in 2019 to encompass what has always been our primary goal - providing students with the ‘best fit’ educational program to achieve their career goals and aspirations.

**Mission**

“We provide educational pathways leading to certification or college degree attainment and career opportunities for students, particularly those who may not otherwise have access.”

**Vision**

“We will give every desiring student the opportunity to enrich their lives and our communities through training and education beyond high school.”
2018-19 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

EARLY COLLEGE AWARENESS PROGRAM

10,580
7th and 8th graders participated in early awareness activities

28
low-income middle schools served by 3 Advisors

2,058
families attended Family Night workshops

HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM

24,337
high school students met individually or in a group activity with Advisors

30
public high schools served by 25 Advisors

$47 million
leveraged in scholarships/financial aid

“LAST-DOLLAR” SCHOLARSHIPS

$842,000
in scholarships to the Class of 2019

580
Scholars eligible to receive scholarships during the school year

475
additional scholarship renewals

COLLEGE SUCCESS PROGRAM

13
Virginia college campuses

602
students received advisory services

90%
six-year retention rate*

*national average is 59%

CAREER CONNECTION PROGRAM

293
Access Scholars in college participated in career development activities

68
secured an internship or job in their intended career field
LeAnne Crabtree is no stranger to the western reaches of the Tidewater region and its small, tight-knit communities.

She graduated from Windsor High in Isle of Wight County in 2010, which has an enrollment today of 493 in grades 9-12. Now the Chowan University graduate has senior classes in three rural high schools to serve as the first Access College Foundation Advisor in Franklin and the counties of Southampton and Surry.

“I actually learned about Access from an incoming freshman at Chowan where I was an admissions counselor the past two years,” says Crabtree, who still lives in nearby Murfreesboro, North Carolina and commutes across the state line, spending one day a week each at Surry, Franklin and Southampton highs. “I was so intrigued that I went to the last two Access College Commitment Days at ODU. They were great!”

She applied when Access, in partnership with Obici Healthcare Foundation, expanded its network of school systems to Western Tidewater to include Surry, which Superintendent Dr. Michael Thornton directs. “We believe that our students have the talent and ability to compete globally when provided with the right opportunities and access to higher education and career development,” says Thornton, “and partnering with a proven entity such as Access College Foundation can do that for our students.”

“I am already helping students complete their FAFSA forms and receive fee waivers so they can take their SAT and other admissions tests,” says the 27-year-old Crabtree. “I will be introducing them to colleges and universities that would be a good academic and financial fit for them, and we will actually do some college tours this year so they can see the campuses for themselves.”

LeAnne has a great support system at Access. “She has tremendous enthusiasm and the ability to relate to the students at these high schools,” says Cheryl Jones, Vice-President for Programs. “As a new program, I know it’s going to be a challenge this first year, but LeAnne is already familiar with the area and will work hard to connect with each school’s administration, parents, teachers and the seniors, who total less than 100 at two of the high schools and 200 at the other.”

Obici Healthcare Foundation is supporting Access because Western Tidewater needs additional workers educated in healthcare and other related fields. “We want to do everything we can to help these students succeed in life,” says Annette Beuchler, CEO of the Suffolk-based non-profit. “And we certainly hope that many will come back to Western Tidewater and use the wisdom and skills they have acquired to benefit their communities.”
Thoughtful, well-spoken and sharp as a tack, George Mason University (GMU) senior Sancia Celestin has the world at her fingertips. She’s a Metro ride away from the nation’s capital. She has solid grades, a supportive mother and next year, she will have a college degree.

To think, back in the summer of 2016 when she was an incoming freshman at Mason, her dreams of attending college were almost crushed because of an overlooked email about financial aid. Sancia, who filed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) form herself, had input her social security number incorrectly.

“The card was faded, and what I thought was one number, was actually another. It was an honest mistake. But that incorrect social security number, which I wrote on everything, flagged my financial aid,” says Sancia. “I had just graduated, it was summertime, and I didn’t notice the email until it was August.”

Because of the near financial aid fiasco, Sancia almost didn’t make it to her fall semester at GMU. After tearful phone calls with the IRS, Sancia turned to her Deep Creek High School Access Advisor Gabriel Hall. It was a long, arduous process to get it right, but thankfully with Mr. Hall’s experience and diligence, Sancia started on time.

But the experience stayed with her.

A daughter of Haitian immigrants, Sancia is a first-generation college student. She rode the bus to Deep Creek from her Indian River home to attend the Science and Medicine Academy (SMA).

Initially pre-med, Sancia was sure she wanted to work in medicine. After going through the college application process and financial aid hiccup, Sancia became more interested in public policy. She volunteered at GMU as a college application coach for
first-generation high school seniors in 2018. This past spring, she accepted a paid internship with the Center for American Progress on the Post-Secondary Education Policy Team in Washington, DC.

Says Sancia: “I realized I want to help people access education. I know there are plenty of students who have gone through similar situations and the experience turned into a roadblock. I am lucky to have people to call on for help and support. I see college as a privilege and everyone should be able to access that privilege.”

One of the people she calls on for support is her Access College Success Advisor Rachal Weaver, whom she considers her college cheerleader.

It was Mrs. Weaver, knowing Sancia’s passion for education, who alerted her to a special opportunity in February 2019 to participate in the National College Access Network’s (NCAN) “Hill Day.” Along with a handful of Access Scholars, as well as Mrs. Weaver and Vice-President for Programs Cheryl Jones, the group traveled to congressional offices around Capitol Hill to advocate for a Pell Grant increase.

“Sancia is such a positive, driven person,” says Mrs. Weaver. “Over the past three years, I’ve gotten to know her ambitions and watch her find her niche. When this opportunity came up, I immediately thought of Sancia and what an excellent job she would do sharing her background and the FAFSA verification process, which was a traumatizing experience for her.”

After Hill Day, NCAN asked Sancia back to Capitol Hill in April, this time to testify as part of a House Appropriations subcommittee’s Public Witness Day. Sitting on a four-person panel with one other student and two advisors, Sancia shared her story and answered questions from the audience.

“Students like me who are underrepresented minorities, children of immigrants, low-socioeconomic background and first generation are fighting for a degree that will bring honor and hope to our families,” Sancia told the crowd, a quote that was later shared by NCAN on Twitter.

Sancia believes there is room for improvement with how the FAFSA works. “College is a big deal. You’re expected to go, but then you’re expected to do it yourself. For me, especially after the FAFSA issue, it’s the constant doubt that I’m doing something wrong or somehow jeopardizing an opportunity. Not everyone has an Access program in their corner,” she says.

After Sancia graduates in May 2020, “I have a hunch she’ll stay in Northern Virginia,” says Mrs. Weaver. “George Mason has been the perfect location for her personal and career interests. There are so many job and internship possibilities in large metropolitan areas.”

Why public policy and education? Sancia sums it up: “These students are worth investing in. I’m worth investing in.”

“ These students are worth investing in. I’m worth investing in.”
Thank you to all our 2019 Donors!

You make the fulfillment of our mission possible. Every contribution, whether from a company or individual, is important to our success.

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Make an Impact with Your Donation

Gifts to the **Annual Support Campaign** allow us to deliver encouragement and support to students across the region.

For some students, the path to college is not an easy one. Between college tours, application fees, SAT and ACT registration costs, and tuition the dollars add up.

Your contribution to this year’s Annual Support Campaign ensures that today’s students have the resources to become tomorrow’s leaders. A donation of any amount will make a difference.

**Donate Today!**

[www.accesscollege.org/donatenow](http://www.accesscollege.org/donatenow)

Ways your contribution can make a life-changing impact:

- **$50** ONE SAT/ACT REGISTRATION FEE
- **$200** UP TO FOUR APPLICATION FEES FOR ONE STUDENT
- **$1,000** A COLLEGE TOUR FOR 50 STUDENTS
- **$5,000** ONE ACCESS “LAST-DOLLAR” SCHOLARSHIP

Financial statements can be found online at [www.accesscollege.org/governance](http://www.accesscollege.org/governance)
New Digs Near Norfolk Airport Will Nearly Triple Staff’s Workspace!

When Access was founded 31 years ago, Norfolk Public Schools (NPS) gratefully offered founding Executive Director Bert Hindmarsh and his Executive Assistant Bonnie Sutton office space in its school administration building. A few years later, after ACCESS had expanded to Portsmouth and added two more employees, NPS donated the use of a larger 700 sq. ft. space, which the staff gratefully used from 1994 until 2006.

By 2006, ACCESS had completed its expansion of services to every public high school in South Hampton Roads and was preparing to add the College Success Program on select college campuses in Virginia. ACCESS needed more space.

When co-founder Josh Darden called on former Mayor Paul Fraim to see if the City of Norfolk had any available space that could be utilized by Access rent-free, they were introduced to the Norfolk Fitness and Wellness Center on Newport Avenue and offered a suite of offices with 2,800 sq. ft. The City had recently purchased the building that had once housed Norfolk Academy and then Jewish Family Service of Tidewater. The available space was ideal for the expanded ACCESS team – at least for the next 10 years.

As the program grew to include nine school districts, 45 team members and additional new programs, the organization was again out of space.

In 2019, a long-time donor and former board member contacted Sutton, now the President and CEO, to ask if she had resolved the space issues they had when he was on the board. “I was thrilled to get that call,” says Sutton, who let him know that they were again bursting at the seams, but had decided to tough it out for the last five-year extension on their lease of the donated space. “With no conference/break room and only one restroom, the idea of moving had remained on the back burner to focus on other mission-driven needs.”

The new location is on Ellsmere Avenue in Norfolk Commerce Park and is also rent and utility free. It has 6,500 sq. ft. including a sizable conference room, individual offices and ample room to meet with Scholars seeking financial aid assistance. It also provides a collaboration area for staff to dream big about the needs of the future.

“Our culture is to be very collaborative, and on Newport Avenue, it has been hard to get everyone together in one place for brainstorming and other sessions. With this delightful new space, now we can,” says Sutton. There are 33 dedicated parking places outside the Ellsmere Avenue location, so if you’re in the vicinity, “stop by and see our new digs,” says Sutton. “We are so proud of our growth and so thankful to our generous friends for giving us this incredible opportunity to enhance our productivity so we can do even more for students in Hampton Roads and beyond.”
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