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Academy of the Canyons Evaluation Brief Number 62

College of the Canyons

Santa Clarita Community College District
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Institutional Research, Planning, and
Institutional Effectiveness

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Introduction

Academy of the Canyons (AOC), a middle college high school, just completed its 25th year of operation on the College of the Canyons campus in the Dr. Dianne G. Van Hook University Center! AOC opened its doors in August 2000. AOC is a collaboration between the William S. Hart Union High School District and College of the Canyons designed to provide a supportive, flexible, and academically enriched environment for students whose needs are not met by the large comprehensive high schools. AOC was awarded a six-year accreditation through 2028 by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and was named a National Blue-Ribbon School in 2015.

Brief History of Middle College High Schools

The first middle college high school was founded in 1974, by La Guardia Professor Janet Lieberman, on the campus of La Guardia Community College in New York City to help remove the barriers between high school and college and to provide an alternative for students at risk of dropping out of high school (Lieberman, 1975). Today there are over 40 middle college high schools across the nation (“Our Schools,” 2025). Currently, the California Community College system funds 14 middle college high schools (“Memorandum,” 2024). The two initial sites in California were Los Angeles Southwest and Contra Costa community colleges and were founded in 1988 (“Middle College High School,” 2025).

AOC’s Student Population

Academy of the Canyons offers a “unique educational experience” for high school students in grades 9-12 that affords them the opportunity to complete high school requirements and take college courses at College of the Canyons’ Valencia campus (“School Profile 2024-25,” 2024). Prior to Fall 2009, AOC was open to 11th and 12th grade students. Beginning Fall 2009, AOC added grades 9 and 10. The goal for total student enrollment for the middle college high school is 400 students. In Fall 2025, enrollment was **386**, which is twice the enrollment of 191 in Fall 2005, five years after it opened. Recruitment focuses on students who meet at least one of four criteria: students who are under-represented in the college environment, students who have high potential but are low performing, students of lower socioeconomic status, and first-generation college students. AOC’s student body in 2024-25 was **77 percent ethnic minority**, excluding White-only students not of Hispanic origin and students for whom ethnicity was not reported. Specifically, 44 percent of the AOC student population identifies themselves as Asian/Pacific Islander; 23 percent identifies as White; 24 percent identifies as Hispanic/Latinx/o/a; two percent identifies as Black/African-American; and six percent identify as two or more races (excludes race/ethnicity data not reported for five students). Over the past eight

Pictured below: Students unwind and get creative in our afterschool ceramics class, part of the arts enrichment program funded by Proposition 28. Held every Friday, this class offers a relaxing and social space for students to explore their artistic talents.





Pictured above: The Sports Club brought the energy with an exciting intramural soccer tournament! As one of 32 student-run clubs on campus, Sports Club provides a fun way for students to stay active and build lasting friendships.

years, the most significant change in the ethnic composition of the AOC student body has been a decline in the White population (32 percent in 2017 compared to 23 percent in 2024). Providing this opportunity to students who are first generation college students, ethnic minority, low-income, and/or have lower academic performance is a component of the early college high school initiative, as well as the mission of the middle college high school. The student body is smaller than traditional high schools, which allows students to get to know each other and their teachers better than they might at a traditional high school. All AOC students are enrolled in “Advisement,” a college readiness class that “teaches students how to navigate the college environment” (“Frequently Asked Questions,” n.d.). The faculty member for the class serves as the students’ advisor throughout

the school year. This class fosters interaction and communication between students and teachers since students are enrolled in Advisement with their teacher/advisor as one of their high school classes.

AOC Students

- Are selected based on a thorough application process and may include an interview with prospective students and parents.
- Take regular high school classes in addition to the college classes.
- Complete at least four high school courses and between 4 and 11 college units per semester depending on the grade level (the \$46/ unit college tuition is waived for all high school students).
- Earn dual credit for college courses, which is recorded on both their college and high school transcripts.
- Use college support services, such as the library, computer labs, tutors, counseling and career centers.
- Complete College of the Canyons Counseling-110 during the Spring semester of their 9th grade year, which helps students with career planning.



Pictured above: Our accomplished Mock Trial team shines both in and out of the courtroom. Competing across Southern California, students meet several times a week to hone their speaking, reasoning, and teamwork skills—while forming strong academic and social connections.

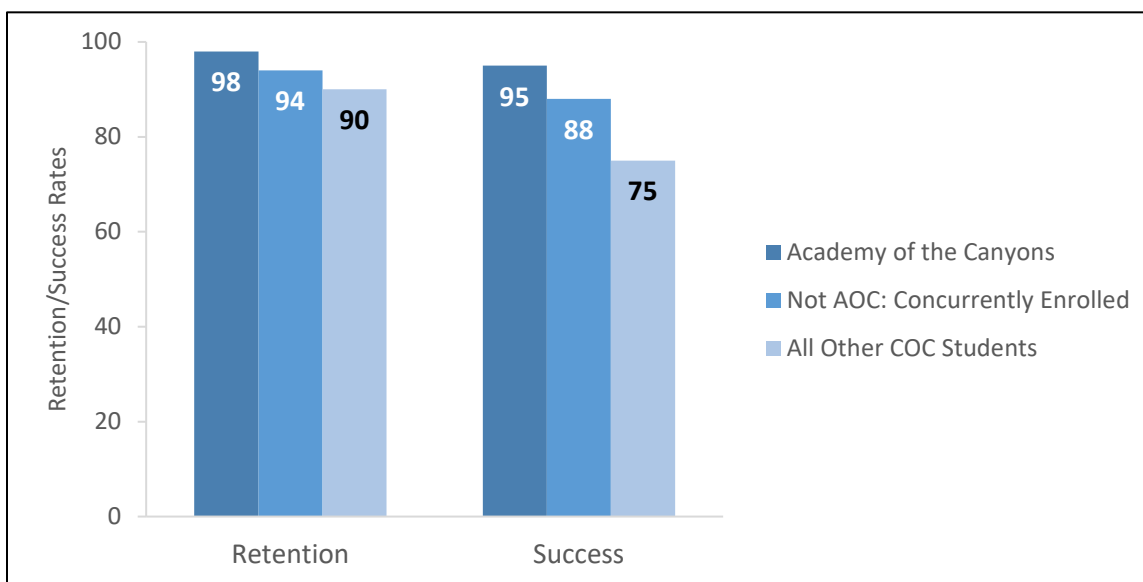
- Receive high support at each grade level with advisement on how to navigate the college environment, develop college level study skills and habits, develop effective time management skills.
- Participate in peer support which is fostered through group projects and peer tutors in addition to the counseling staff supporting students' educational plans.
- Have the opportunity to participate in clubs, including the National Honor Society.
- Typically, have a high school GPA of 3.0 or higher and have shown to be motivated, mature, independent learners.



Pictured left: Students take the spotlight in our new AOC TV program, guided by Mr. Wilhelm in the Communications class. This weekly broadcast gives students hands-on experience in filming, news writing, and storytelling while keeping the school community informed and engaged.

Retention and Success Rates

Figure 1. Fall 2024 Retention and Success Rates for AOC Students Compared to Concurrently Enrolled Students (Not AOC) and Other COC Students in similar courses



Academy of the Canyons was evaluated using outcome measures that were based on students' success in college courses. Two measures used were students' retention (completing the college courses without withdrawing) and success (passing the college courses with a "C" or better). AOC students were compared to other (not AOC) concurrently enrolled students and all other (non-high school) COC students in the *same college classes*. As is evidenced by Figure 1, AOC students outperformed other COC students in the same classes. **In Fall 2024, the success rate for AOC students was seven percentage points higher than other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC) and 20 percentage points higher than other COC students in the same classes.** Historically, for more than 20 years, success rates for AOC students have been higher than all other COC students enrolled in the same courses.

Consistently, high success rates of AOC students (see Figure 3) could be attributed to a number of factors including: the support services and resources available through the counseling, mental health, career readiness and advisement services at AOC; the majority of students attending AOC for all four years of their high school career (starting in 2013-14 to the present); accelerated math and English courses offered at COC; and availability of COC services such as the Tutoring/Learning/Computing Lab and Supplemental Learning workshops.

Retention Rates

Figure 2. Retention Rates for AOC Students Compared to Concurrently Enrolled Students (Not AOC) and Other COC Students: Fall 2020, Fall 2021, Fall 2022, Fall 2023, and Fall 2024 in similar courses

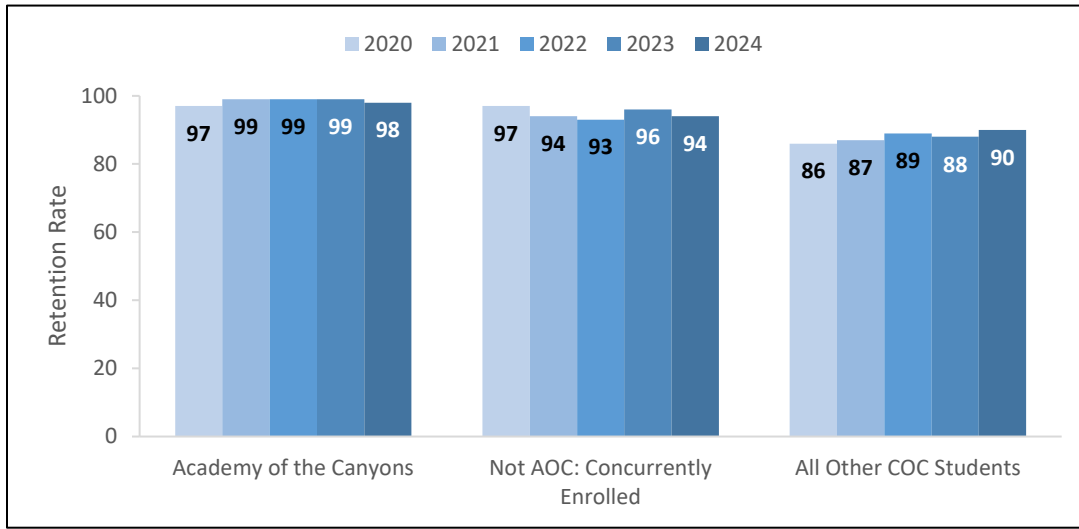


Figure 2 illustrates retention rates over time for AOC students compared to other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC) and other COC students in the same college classes. Overall, AOC retention rates were higher than other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC), with the exception of fall 2020 (first fall with COVID-19 protocols), when the rates were the same. AOC students also had higher retention rates than other COC students in the same classes (eight or more percentage points higher for the last five fall semesters).

Success Rates

Figure 3. Success Rates for AOC Students Compared to Concurrently Enrolled Students (Not AOC) and Other COC Students: Fall 2020, Fall 2021, Fall 2022, Fall 2023, and Fall 2024 in similar courses

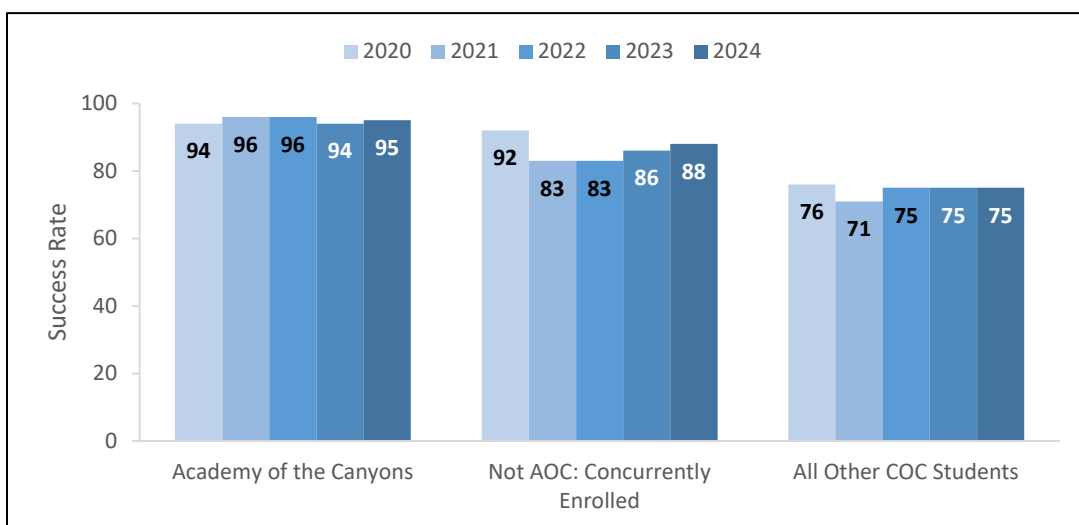


Figure 3 illustrates success rates over time for AOC students compared to other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC) and other COC students in the same college classes. Success rates for **AOC students** in Fall 2024 **remain high at 95 percent**,

which is consistently higher than ‘all other COC students’ by 18 or more percentage points over the past five years!

Historically, AOC success rates have been higher than non-AOC, concurrently enrolled students.

Additional analyses comparing AOC 9th and 10th grade students with 11th and 12th grade students showed that success rates were 96 percent for AOC 9th and 10th grade students and 93 percent for 11th and 12th grade AOC students in Fall 2024. The difference in success rates is likely due to the difference in courses taken by each group. For example, AOC 9th and 10th grade students are permitted to enroll in a limited selection of classes. AOC 11th and 12th grade students enroll in a wide variety of courses. Courses taken by AOC juniors and seniors at COC in Fall 2024 with the highest enrollments included Chem-151 (Preparatory General Chemistry), Math-140 (Introductory Statistics), Sign-101 (American Sign Language I), Math-212 (Calculus II), and Spanish-101 (Introductory Spanish).

During the Fall 2024 semester, AOC students enrolled in courses in 41 different disciplines (see Table 1), including 166 enrollments in Kinesiology/Physical Education, 163 enrollments in Math, and 90 enrollments in Computer Applications and Web Technology.

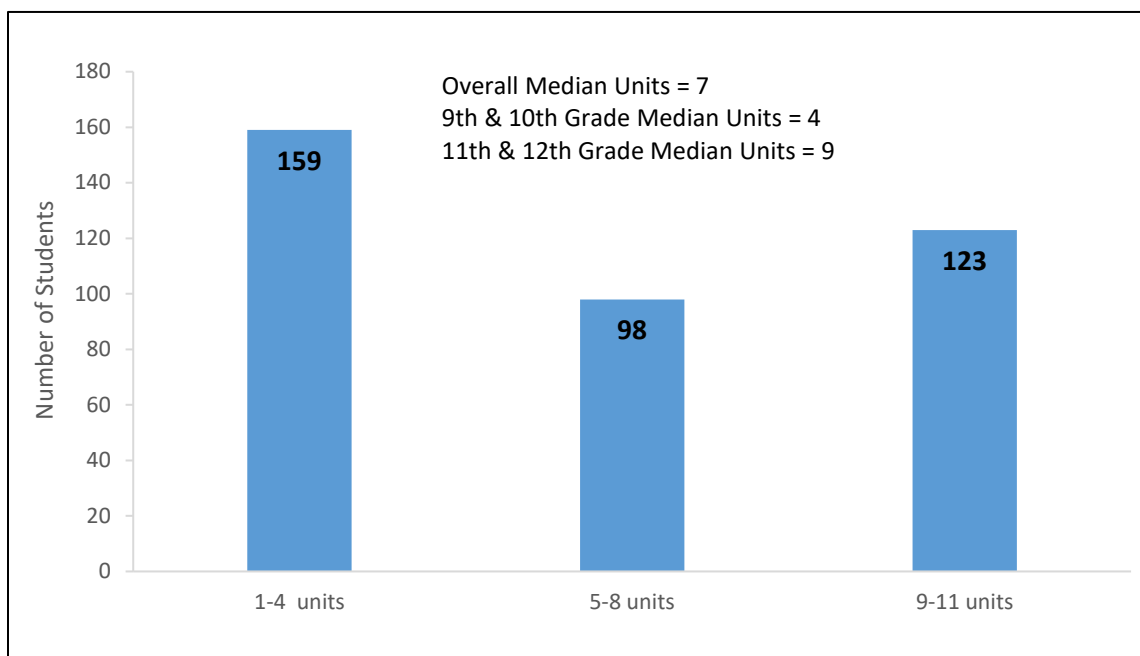
Table 1. AOC Enrollment at COC by Academic Discipline: Fall 2024

Discipline	Enrollments	Discipline	Enrollments	Discipline	Enrollments
Administration of Justice	1	Ethnic Studies	1	Oceanography	9
Anthropology	2	Fire Technology	2	Paralegal Studies	1
Architecture	1	French	5	Philosophy	4
Art	22	Geography	2	Photography	15
Astronomy	1	Geology	6	Physical Sciences	4
Biological Sciences	18	German	1	Physics	14
Business	6	Graphic Multimedia Design	5	Political Science	4
Chemistry	32	Health Sciences	3	Psychology	26
Cinema	3	History	8	Real Estate	1
Communication Studies	6	Kinesiology/Physical Education	166	Sign Language	32
Computer Applications & Web Technologies	90	Math	163	Sociology	7
Computer Science	14	Media Entertainment Arts	46	Spanish	53
Engineering	1	Music	26	Theatre	8
Environmental Sciences	1	Non-credit	3		

UC and CSU Transferable Units Completed

An analysis was done to determine the number of UC and CSU units successfully completed by AOC students during the Fall 2024 semester (Note: successfully completed is defined as passing UC / CSU transferable courses with a “C” or better). Overall, the median number of UC and CSU units successfully completed by all AOC students during the Fall 2024 semester was seven. The median number of UC and CSU units successfully completed by 11th and 12th grade AOC students during the Fall 2024 semester was nine (increased from eight in the prior year), and, despite restrictions on the range of college classes available to them, the median number of UC and CSU units successfully completed by AOC students in grades 9 and 10 was four. Note: According to California State law, dually enrolled students are not permitted to enroll in more than 11 college units per semester.

Figure 4. CSU and UC Transferable Units Successfully Completed by AOC Students Present During the Fall 2024 Semester (Grades 9-12)



Notable Highlights in 2024/25

- 97 graduating seniors in the class of 2025
- 13 AOC seniors maintained a 4.0 GPA at both COC and AOC through the fall 2024 semester
- 54 AOC seniors earned a 3.55 to 3.97 AOC/COC GPA through the summer 2024 term
- 61 students graduated with at least one Associate degree
- 75% of the 2025 graduating class will be attending a 4-year institution
- 25% will be attending a UC institution (a large percentage decrease from 35% the previous year)
- 25% are headed for a CSU institution



Pictured above: ASB President Tristan Simoncioni takes the stage to read the names of graduates and warmly welcome guests at this year's graduation ceremony—a proud moment for our student leadership.

- 22% will be attending a community college (a large percentage increase from 14% the previous year)
- Additional institutions that AOC graduates will be attending include the University of Chicago (n=1), John Hopkins University (n=1), and a Military Academy (n=1)

Pictured right: Our 2025 graduation ceremony was held in the beautiful Performing Arts Center at College of the Canyons, celebrating the achievements of our graduating class in a memorable and inspiring setting.



For more information on this evaluation brief, email Meredith Hamilton at meredith.hamilton@canyons.edu or Dr. Preeta Saxena, Dean, Institutional Research, Planning and Effectiveness at preeta.saxena@canyons.edu.

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