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Academy of the Canyons Evaluation Brief Number 63

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 26th 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 and 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 (“School Profile 2025-26,” 2025).

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 34 middle college high schools across the nation (“Our Schools,” 2026). 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,” 2026).

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 2025-26,” 2025). 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 **374**, which is nearly 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 socio-economic status, and first-generation college students. AOC’s student body in Fall 2025 was **76 percent ethnic minority**, excluding White-only students not of Hispanic



Pictured above: AOC seniors proudly showcase their Senior Capstone Project: a fully functional drone they designed and built from scratch using engineering, physics, and mathematics. Students Aarush Pillai, Vladyslav Khavalko, Advait Krishnamoorthy, and John Gerahardt collaborated on this impressive example of project-based learning, culminating in a meaningful final project that reflects the knowledge and skills they developed during their time at AOC.

Pictured below: Principal Dr. Juliet Fine and ASB President Diya Ravikumar accept recognition on behalf of Academy of the Canyons from the William S. Hart Union High School District in celebration of AOC being named a 2026 California Distinguished School—an honor recognizing the school's outstanding academic achievement, innovation, and commitment to student success.



origin and students for whom ethnicity was not reported. Specifically, 46 percent of the AOC student population identifies themselves as Asian/Filipino; 24 percent identifies as White; 23 percent identifies as Hispanic/Latinx/o/a; two percent identifies as Black/African-American; and five percent identify as two or more races (excludes race/ethnicity data not reported for five students). Over the past eight years, the most significant change in the ethnic composition of the AOC student body has been a decline in the White population (-8% from 2017 to 2025) and an increase in the Asian/Filipino population (+9% from 2017 to 2025). 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.

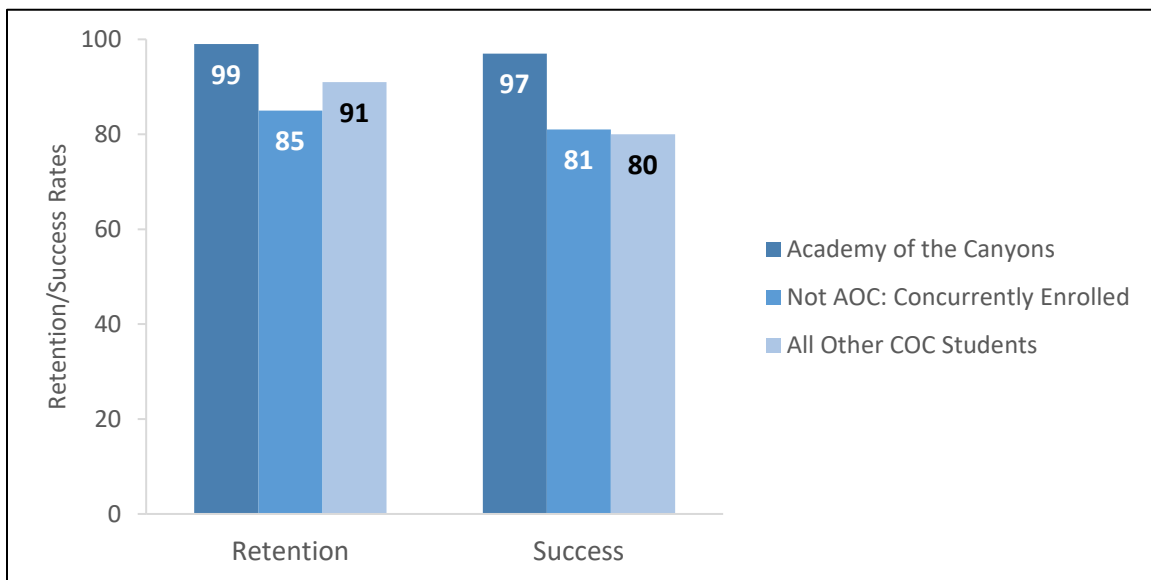
- Use college support services, such as the library, computer labs, tutors, counseling and career centers.
- Complete College of the Canyons Counseling-110 during the Spring semester of their 9th grade year, which helps students with career planning.
- Receive high support at each grade level with advisement 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 above: 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.

Retention and Success Rates

Figure 1. Fall 2025 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 2025, the success rate for AOC students was 16 percentage points higher than other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC) and 17 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 2021, Fall 2022, Fall 2023, Fall 2024, and Fall 2025 in similar courses

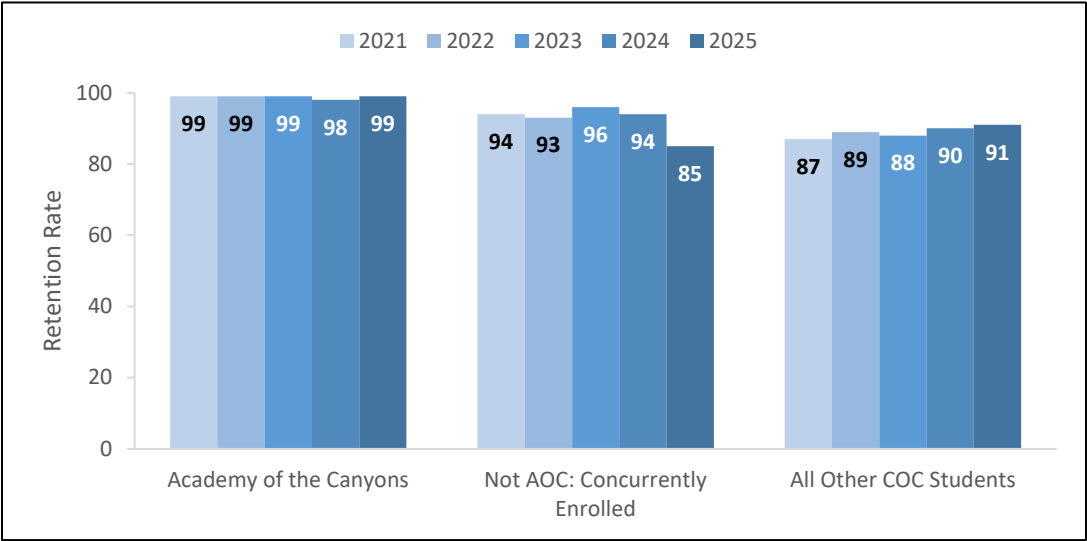


Figure 2 illustrates retention rates over time for AOC students compared to other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC) and other COC students in the same college classes. Overall, AOC retention rates were higher than other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC), particularly during this latest year in which retention rates among other concurrently enrolled students declined while retention rates for AOC remained steady. 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 2021, Fall 2022, Fall 2023, Fall 2024, and Fall 2025 in similar courses

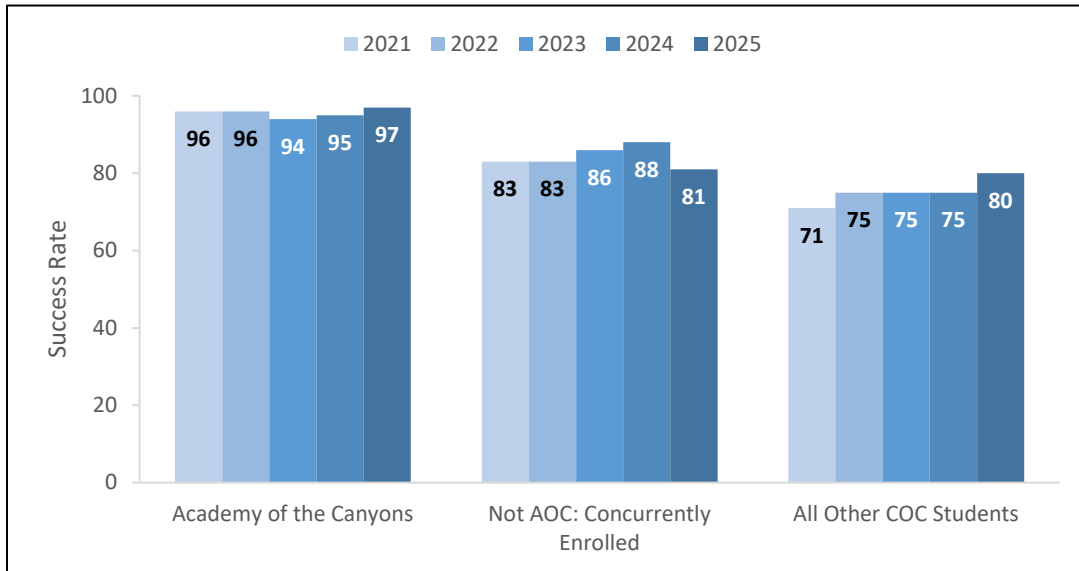


Figure 3 illustrates success rates over time for AOC students compared to other concurrently enrolled students (not AOC) and other COC students in the same college classes. Success rates for **AOC students** in Fall 2025 **remain high at 97 percent, which is consistently higher than ‘all other COC students’ by 17 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 98 percent for AOC 9th and 10th grade students and 96 percent for 11th and 12th grade AOC students in Fall 2025. The small 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 2025 with the highest enrollments included Spanish-101 (Introductory Spanish), Math-212 (Calculus II), Stat-C1000 (Introductory Statistics – formerly Math-140), Chem-151 (Preparatory General Chemistry), and Sign-101 (American Sign Language I).

During the Fall 2025 semester, AOC students enrolled in courses in 39 different disciplines (see Table 1), including 178 enrollments in Math, 166 enrollments in Kinesiology-Physical Education, and 90 enrollments in Computer Applications and Web Technologies.

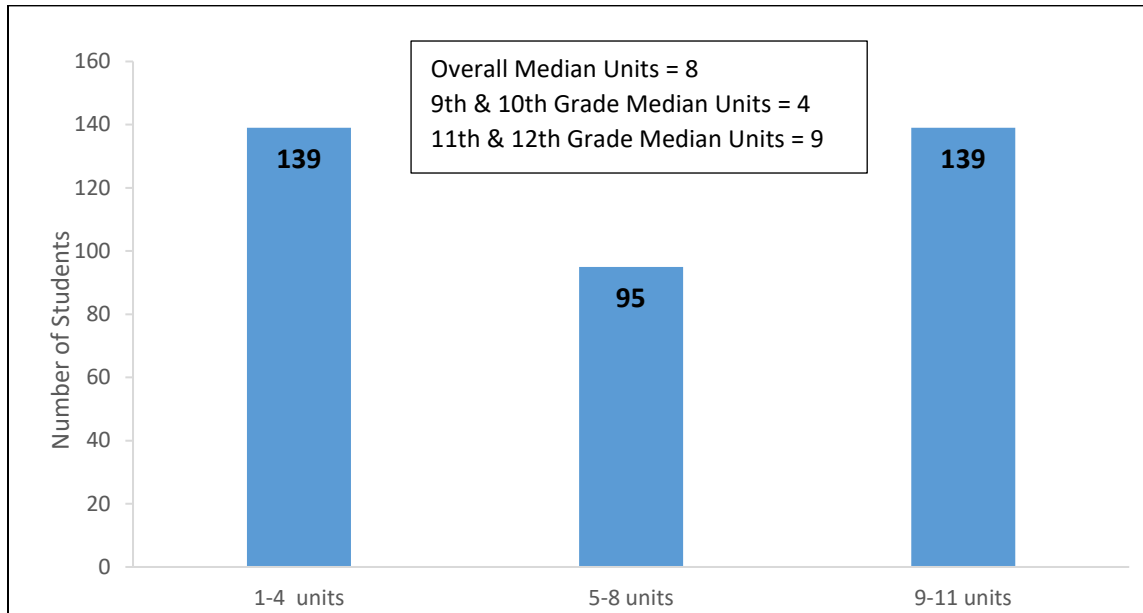
Table 1. AOC Enrollment at COC by Academic Discipline: Fall 2025

Discipline	Enrollments	Discipline	Enrollments	Discipline	Enrollments
Anthropology	6	English	2	Music	29
Art	15	Environmental Sciences	2	Oceanography	1
Biological Sciences	24	Ethnic Studies	15	Paralegal	1
Business	14	French	5	Philosophy	2
Chemistry	32	Geology	5	Photography	10
Chinese	1	German	1	Physical Science	1
Cinema	4	Graphic and Multimedia Design	3	Physics	14
Communication Studies	14	Health Sciences	3	Psychology	21
Computer Applications & Web Technologies	90	History	6	Sign Language	33
Computer Science	2	Kinesiology-Physical Education	166	Sociology	8
Culinary Arts	3	Law Enforcement Technology	1	Spanish	54
Dance	1	Mathematics	178	Theatre	9
Economics	1	Media Entertainment Arts	29	Work Experience Education	2

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 2025 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 2025 semester was eight. The median number of UC and CSU units successfully completed by 11th and 12th grade AOC students during the Fall 2025 semester was nine 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 2025 Semester (Grades 9-12)



Notable Highlights in 2025/26

- Academy of the Canyons was recognized as a California Distinguished School as a top-performing school showing progress for underserved groups.
- The average daily attendance at school was 98%.
- AOC students were awarded first and second place in the SCV Bar Association High School Speech Competition.
- Many AOC students participated in the Robotics 691 team, which won first place in the SoCal Showdown Competition against hundreds of other Southern California Schools.
- Three AOC students were recognized for their art works in the Santa Clarita Sister Cities YAAS Awards.
- The AOC Mock Trial Team earned 3rd place at the 33rd Annual Antelope Valley Mock Trial Tournament.



Pictured above: AOC students took first and second place at the SCV Bar Association High School Speech Competition. High school juniors and senior write and deliver short speeches at this event, judged by Los Angeles County Superior Court judges.



Pictured left: AOC graduates celebrate in the beautiful Performing Arts Center at College of the Canyons, recognizing 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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