

Presidential Search




Stark State
COLLEGE





Contents

- 1 The Position
- 2 About Stark State College
- 4 Building a Strong Foundation
- 6 Governance and Leadership
 - Our People
 - Enrollment
- 7 College Profile
- 8 Academics
- 9 Workforce Partnerships
 - Finances and Funding
 - Stark State College Foundation and Strategic Grants
- 10 Akron-Canton: Where Affordability and Opportunity Meet
- 11 Invitation to Apply
 - The Opportunity
 - The Leadership Agenda
- 14 Qualifications, Attributes, Skills and Experiences
- 16 Nominations and Applications



The Position

The Stark State College Board of Trustees seeks an innovative, future-focused and student-centered leader to serve as the College's next president and help shape the future of workforce-responsive higher education in Northeast Ohio. This role is an opportunity to lead one of Ohio's largest and most financially stable community colleges at a time of significant regional growth, workforce transformation and evolving educational demand.

The next president will succeed Dr. Para M. Jones, who is retiring after a highly successful 14-year tenure marked by institutional growth, strong community partnerships and expanded opportunities for students and employers.

Reporting directly to the Board, the president serves as Stark State's chief executive officer and is responsible for strategic vision, institutional leadership and operational effectiveness. The Board seeks a visionary, innovative, emotionally intelligent and politically astute leader with a deep understanding of, and passion for, community college education. The successful candidate will build trust, inspire confidence and cultivate strong relationships among students, faculty, staff, employers, policymakers and community partners through effective, transparent and collaborative leadership.

As the public face and primary advocate for Stark State, the president must be highly engaged with business, industry, education and government leaders. This leader will strengthen employer partnerships to ensure programs are aligned with labor-market needs while collaborating with local, state and federal policymakers to advance workforce development and student success.

The president must balance innovation with fiscal responsibility, champion excellence in teaching and learning, and be adept at successfully moving projects forward. Through inclusive leadership and a commitment to shared governance, the president will foster a culture of belonging, accountability, professional growth and continuous improvement.





About Stark State College

Founded in 1960, Stark State College is a student-centered community college providing open access to high quality, affordable education aligned with workforce needs and university transfer.

With campuses in Stark and Summit counties, the College serves nearly 13,000 students annually and is the fifth largest of 22 public two-year colleges in the University System of Ohio. Stark State offers more than 200 associate degree, bachelor's degree, certificate and credential programs that prepare students for immediate employment, career advancement or continued education.

Known for exceptional affordability with strong student outcomes and unique employer partnerships, Stark State and its industry-experienced faculty have established the College as a regional leader in workforce-aligned education and economic impact.

Stark State maintains more than 30 articulation/transfer agreements with four-year colleges and universities, including all public and private institutions in the region and The Ohio State University, creating seamless, affordable pathways to bachelor's degrees. Additionally, the College offers an innovative partnership with NEOMED, enabling qualified Associate of Science graduates to enter the Doctor of Pharmacy program directly, accelerating time to degree and strengthening the workforce pipeline.

Accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, Stark State also maintains specialized program accreditations across multiple disciplines. These distinctions reflect the College's sustained commitment to academic quality, continuous improvement, and responsiveness to students, employers and the communities it serves.

Collectively, these accomplishments have positioned Stark State as one of Ohio's most impactful, respected and forward-looking community colleges.



View the College's 2026-28 strategic plan/mission and vision.



Locations and facilities

The College's main campus in Canton, featuring more than 600,000 square feet across 13 buildings on 200 acres in the heart of the region's restaurant and retail district.

The Akron location, a 68,000-square-foot facility located just off Route 8 in downtown Akron, opened in 2017.

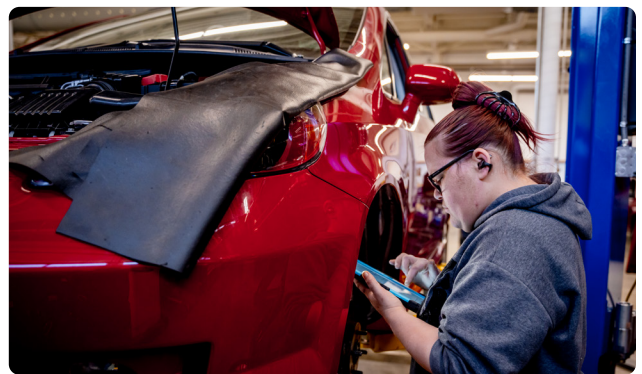
The Downtown Canton Satellite Center, serving primarily early college high school students.

The CDL Training Center in Akron, a six-acre property offering Class A CDL, Class B CDL and CDL HazMat Endorsement Training.

The world-class W.R. Timken Advanced Manufacturing Laboratory features state-of-the-art CNC machining education and training.

The Fire Science Training Center, including classrooms, tower and burn building.

Auxiliary facilities including the Advanced Technology Center, two automotive centers, two welding and joining centers and a law enforcement academy.





Building a Strong Foundation

Dr. Para M. Jones, Stark State College's fourth president, has served the institution since 2012 with a deep commitment to student success and workforce alignment.

Her tenure has been marked by the expansion of high-quality, affordable education that leads to gainful employment across the region. The next leader will have a unique opportunity to build on this momentum to advance the College's mission for years to come. Under Dr. Jones' leadership, Stark State College has:



Expanded access and reach

- **Grown** its service district to include Akron and Summit County.
- **Expanded** College Credit Plus (CCP) partnerships with K–12 districts across Northeast Ohio and beyond.



Strengthened student success, academic pathways and partnerships

- **Improved** student success outcomes, including graduation rates at the highest levels in College history.
- **Launched** the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program.
- **Partnered** with NEOMED to create seamless pathways from associate degrees to doctoral programs in pharmacy, as well as pre-medical and pre-dental tracks.
- **Established** the Direct Connect program with The University of Akron.
- **Formed** a historic articulation agreement with The Ohio State University.
- **Created** a welcoming and supportive campus for military members, veterans and their families, with tailored support services and efforts that earned Stark State the distinction of being one of the first Collegiate Purple Star campuses in Ohio.



Deepened workforce alignment

- **Significantly** expanded strategic employer partnerships in key industry sectors, including healthcare, advanced manufacturing, technology, transportation and skilled trades.
- **Created** Learn and Earn programs enabling high school students to gain college credits in high-demand fields such as HVAC and welding.
- **Launched** new workforce-responsive programs in artificial intelligence, licensed practical nursing and commercial driver training in response to evolving regional and state workforce needs.



Maintained strong fiscal stability

- **Achieved** maximum state fiscal stability ratings.
- **Successfully** retired \$20 million of debt, placing the College in a debt-free position.
- **Increased** college reserves by 266%.
- **Increased** foundation endowment by 470%.
- **Attracted** nearly \$85 million in federal, state and local grants to support students and enhance the local economy.



Achieved national recognition and impact

- **Recognized** by Harvard University, Georgetown University and American Institutes for Research as a top producer of graduates in high-wage, high-demand fields.
- **Consistently** led Ohio institutions in producing graduates in high-demand engineering technology, manufacturing and related fields.





Governance and Leadership

Stark State College is governed by a nine-member Board of Trustees, appointed through gubernatorial and local processes to ensure strong civic, business and community representation. The Board establishes policy and provides strategic oversight, while the president serves as chief executive officer, lead community advocate and primary institutional spokesperson.

The president leads a six-member Executive Council responsible for the College's strategic direction and operations, including the Provost and Chief Academic Officer, Chief Financial Officer, and four Vice Presidents.

Within a shared governance framework, the president also oversees the President's Cabinet, which advises on policy and monitors implementation of the strategic plan and resource allocation.

Our People

Stark State's strength is reflected in its workforce of more than 800 employees, including 164 full-time faculty and 195 full-time staff. More than 200 employees are also Stark alumni and the college is further supported by approximately 450 part-time faculty and staff.

With an average tenure of eight years overall, and 11 years among full-time employees, the College benefits from deep institutional knowledge and a culture grounded in a strong commitment to student access and success. Operating within a non-unionized environment, Stark State is well positioned to remain agile and responsive to evolving student and workforce needs.

Enrollment

Stark State College continues to experience positive enrollment momentum, driven by strong demand for affordable, career-focused education aligned with Northeast Ohio's workforce needs. In Spring 2026, overall enrollment increased 1.6% in headcount and 2.1% in FTE, while new student enrollment increased 6%.

The College has also demonstrated sustained growth, with overall enrollment increasing 5.9% from Fall 2023 through Fall 2025 and College Credit Plus (CCP) enrollment growing 16%. Stark State serves thousands of students across Northeast Ohio and continues to strategically expand its regional presence and market share, particularly through its growing Summit County/Akron service area, workforce partnerships and flexible educational delivery models.

Stark State is the regional CCP leader, serving more than 4,300 students through strong partnerships with secondary schools and homeschool communities across the region.

The College continues to see strong demand in healthcare, engineering technologies, advanced manufacturing, business, and other high-demand fields. Healthcare programming remains a signature institutional strength and a major driver of enrollment, workforce impact and regional employer partnerships. The College's nursing programs in particular serve more than 1,000 students annually across multiple pathways, including a recently launched Bachelor of Science in Nursing.



College Profile

Average age: 27

58% female, 42% male

70% part time, 30% full time

70% of students work while attending

22% students of color; more than 50% minority at SSC Akron

46% first-generation college students



5th LARGEST
COMMUNITY
COLLEGE
IN OHIO

TOP 5 FIELDS



nursing 1050
LPN/RN/BSN



business 632
MANAGEMENT



computer 578
SCIENCE & IT



APPLIED 523
ENGINEERING



ASSOCIATE OF 238
SCIENCE(S)

TOTAL
ENROLLMENT

10,390

CCP
Early College
ENROLLMENT

4,375

Stark 62%
Summit 14%
36 counties total represented

student profile

low
income
50%

full-time
24%

OHIO
COUNTIES
54

states
18

percentage of enrollment
Stark 36%
Summit 39%



Academics

Stark State College, which is accredited through the Higher Learning Commission, offers more than 200 associate degrees and certificates, as well as a bachelor's degree in nursing, that align with the needs of students and employers. Programs are intentionally organized into 10 career communities designed to simplify the student experience, strengthen advising and create clearer pathways to employment, credential attainment and university transfer.

Stark State offers strong, career-focused programs supported by advanced facilities and hands-on learning. Its high-demand IT programs include a nationally recognized Cybersecurity program designated as a National Center of Academic Excellence, preparing students in cutting-edge labs for critical information security roles. Innovative business and accounting programs feature seamless 3+1 pathways to bachelor's degrees, while a robust science curriculum supports top-tier health programs, including anatomy and physiology labs with human cadavers, providing immersive experiences rarely found at the community college level.

Extensive employer partnerships spanning decades have strengthened the College's exceptional applied technology programs, supported by industry-grade labs and equipment in automotive, HVAC-R, welding, CNC machining, industrial maintenance, robotics and automation – ensuring students train in environments that mirror today's workplaces.

The College awards Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, Associate of Applied Science, Associate of Applied Business and Associate of Technical Studies degrees.

Widely recognized for aligning engineering technology, advanced manufacturing and skilled technical education directly with employer demand, making it a leading workforce talent partner distinguished by Harvard's Kennedy School as a model for employer-aligned workforce education and innovation.

Leads the state's community colleges in engineering and related associate degrees and certificates.

Maintains the College's highest graduation rate to date.

Improved student retention by 10% for full-time students from 2024 to 2025

Selected as one of five Strengthening Community Colleges-4 grant recipients nationwide to receive an additional \$2 million in funding for a nursing impact study.

Career Communities

- Administrative services, legal assisting and court reporting
- Business and accounting
- Computer science, information technology, security and digital media
- Culinary
- Education
- Engineering technologies, industrial, advanced manufacturing and automotive technologies
- Health
- Human services, social services and public safety
- Liberal arts
- Mathematics and sciences



Workforce Partnerships

Stark State College serves as a critical workforce and economic development partner across Northeast Ohio, collaborating closely with employers to recruit, train, upskill and retain talent through flexible, industry-driven solutions.

Partnerships are especially strong in advanced manufacturing, engineering technologies, healthcare and skilled trades, where employers increasingly rely on Stark State as a strategic talent pipeline partner.

The College offers credit, non-credit and fully customized contract training programs designed to meet evolving employer needs, including apprenticeships, short-term credentials and employer-sponsored education pathways.

The College works across a wide range of industry employers including Akron Children's, Ariel Corporation, City of Akron, Enbridge, Plumbers and Pipefitters, Summa Health and more.

Finances and Funding

Ensuring Stark State College's long-term financial stability is a top priority of College leadership and the Board of Trustees. The College begins each fiscal year with a balanced budget and makes strategic decisions to maintain a year-end surplus that meets institutional obligations. More than two decades of strong financial stewardship have positioned Stark State exceptionally well, with virtually no debt, no deferred maintenance, and strong reserves that support stability and future growth.

Primary revenue sources include State Share of Instruction, tuition and fees, capital appropriations and grants. Sustaining financial health depends on effectively navigating the state funding formula, engaging in legislative processes, and aligning programs with workforce needs. By balancing employee benefits, resource demands, and political and academic expectations with fiscal responsibility, Stark State maintains strong financial performance that supports student success and delivers accessible, affordable, high-quality education for students, employers and the community.

Stark State College Foundation and Strategic Grants

The Stark State College Foundation is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt corporation established in 1986 with a 30-member board of directors comprising community and business leaders, and alumni and retirees. Its mission is to open doors to relationships and resources that support the success of students, partners and communities. The Foundation supports students through scholarships, emergency funding and campus improvements.

Over the past five years:

- More than 4,500 Stark State students have benefited from \$3.4 million in scholarships.
- Annual scholarship awards increased from \$400,000 to \$700,000 (1,000 awards), a 175% increase.
- The Foundation's endowment increased to \$13.7 million, a 155% increase.

The Strategic Grants office pursues public and private funding that expands access, supports workforce development and drives innovation. The office partners closely with faculty to translate strategic priorities into funded initiatives to the benefit of our students. In the past five years, the Strategic Grants Office has secured more than \$26.5 million in grant awards, including setting a school record in FY2025 with over \$8 million awarded.



Akron-Canton: Where Affordability and Opportunity Meet

Akron-Canton, part of the larger 14-county Northeast Ohio region, offers the best of both worlds – economic opportunity and affordable living paired with easy access to culture, outdoor recreation and major metropolitan areas including Cleveland, Columbus and Pittsburgh.

Home to nationally recognized employers such as Goodyear, Cleveland Clinic, Summa Health, The Timken Company and FirstEnergy, the region supports a diverse and resilient economy spanning healthcare, advanced manufacturing, education and technology. Akron, historically known as the Rubber City for its role in the tire industry, has evolved into a nationally recognized hub for polymer science, advanced manufacturing, biomedical materials and sustainability innovation.

Residents enjoy vibrant downtowns, a growing arts and culinary scene, and abundant outdoor amenities—from local parks and trails to nearby Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Major tourist attractions such as the Pro Football Hall of Fame and Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens, as well as the “big three” professional sports teams in Cleveland, add to the region’s appeal.

With convenient access to Akron-Canton Airport and Cleveland Hopkins International Airport, short commutes, and a cost of living well below the national average, Akron-Canton is an ideal place to call home.





INVITATION TO APPLY

The Opportunity

Stark State seeks a transformational leader who is collaborative, visionary and prepared to lead and represent a forward-thinking institution with a strategic focus on and commitment to meeting with educational and training needs of the communities it serves.

What follows is a leadership agenda of opportunities and challenges, as well as the qualifications, attributes, skills and experiences the new president will need to possess.

The Leadership Agenda

Student Centeredness – The new president will have the opportunity to demonstrate that students and their needs are at the center of the new leader’s vision, strategic priorities and decision-making process. They will be dedicated to the community college mission of providing open admission and access. They will be actively involved with students to support engagement and student success.

Strategic Enrollment Management – Despite significant demographic and competitive pressures facing higher education nationally, Stark State has demonstrated notable enrollment momentum and student retention gains. In like manner, the College’s fall-to-fall retention percentage increased by ten percentage points from 2023-2024. The new president will work with colleagues to build on this foundation to achieve even higher levels of recruitment, retention and completion.

New market demand programs, including degrees (bachelor’s and associate) and certificates, as well as enhanced service to Akron and surrounding counties will also contribute to enrollment. These programs may be online or in person depending on market needs. Attention to changing workforce needs will also be an important element in the College’s enrollment management efforts. Notably, healthcare programs remain a significant enrollment opportunity as are nontraditional students looking to make a midlife career change.

Affordability is a significant advantage for Stark State that can be leveraged in a highly competitive market.

The president will be well aware that polls show students are more skeptical of the value of a college degree than in the past and the new leader will advocate for a clear and convincing value proposition for Stark State.





Academic Excellence – The president will be an advocate for academic excellence and rigor in the classroom for all programs. Professional development and support for faculty as well as assessment will be helpful in this vital area.

Strategic Planning – The time horizon for the College’s strategic plan runs through 2028. Accordingly, once the new president assumes office, one of their first tasks will be to organize a new strategic planning effort, including an innovative shared vision for Stark State’s future and an alignment between the strategy and student success.

The Polymer Industry Cluster (PIC) – The PIC, launched in Akron in 2021, represents a more than \$100 million investment and has positioned the region as the nation’s designated sustainable polymer technology hub. This initiative is poised to create substantial opportunities for strategic partnerships and workforce development, which the next president will actively advance and fully leverage for Stark State.

The College is uniquely positioned to strengthen its role as a regional and statewide leader in employer-aligned engineering technology and advanced manufacturing education, particularly through opportunities associated with the Polymer Industry Cluster and evolving workforce demands.

Partnerships – More generally, the president will be active in the communities Stark State serves and will seek to strengthen existing employer led partnerships and create new ones with the business community, K-12 systems and other higher education entities that can lead to new opportunities. For example, such opportunities could include program development, certificate offerings to enhance College Credit Plus, new student markets and other ways to meet student needs, while maintaining quality and affordability.

Deep Listening and Shared Governance – The next president will demonstrate emotional intelligence, humility, curiosity and thoughtful engagement by listening deeply before implementing significant change. The president will need to take the time to learn the unique Stark State culture. Specifically, an effective relationship with the shared governance system will be elemental to successful change management. This dynamic is particularly important because Stark State is a non-union environment. The president will also have the chance to employ clear communication that will inspire colleagues to move forward.

Presence – The new president will be a visible, approachable and highly engaged presence building trust with faculty, staff, students, trustees, employer partners, elected officials and communities served by the College. They will also be committed to becoming part of the Stark State community and making it a long-term career choice.



Financial Stability – The College has essentially no debt and is expected to add \$1.9 million to its fund balance this fiscal year. The new president will work with colleagues to maintain this financial strength and the flexibility and agility it affords.

Fundraising – Fiscal 2024-2025 saw a record-breaking total of gifts and grants for the Foundation: \$11 million. The next leader will help elevate the College’s philanthropic profile and expand strategic fundraising efforts that support scholarships, innovation, capital initiatives and long-term institutional priorities. The new president will have the opportunity to raise additional funds for the endowment, student scholarships and other capital initiatives.

Legislative Relations – 45% of Stark State’s budget comes from the State of Ohio. Hence, the new president will make legislative relations a priority and advocate for funding and other policy measures beneficial to Stark State. The president will also make the case to public officials that Stark State serves a distinct niche in the marketplace, different from the four-year sector. Alignment between Stark State and Ohio’s workforce agenda will be an important part of these conversations.

Co-Located Campus and Branding – The Stark State North Canton campus is co-located with Kent State University. Periodically, voices in state government favor merger of such campuses. The president will confidently articulate and champion Stark State’s distinct value proposition, workforce mission and regional impact within Ohio’s evolving higher education landscape.

Changes in Education Policy – The past year has brought a dizzying amount of change in federal education policy. Moreover, Ohio’s education continues to evolve with elections on the horizon. The president and their colleagues will navigate the College successfully through these significant changes.

Recognition for the Efforts of Colleagues – The next president will pause and take time to recognize the expertise, hard work and contributions of colleagues, a practice that is integral to building relationships.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) – The president will be an advocate for employing this revolutionary technology to enhance the student experience and the quality of work life. AI has many benefits, along with concerns that should be considered.

The Board, Faculty and Staff – Stark State is fortunate to have a talented and engaged Board. The president will build an effective and high functioning relationship with the Trustees. They will also find highly dedicated faculty and staff colleagues with whom they will do mission centric work. These relationships will be vital to the College’s future.



Qualifications, Attributes, Skills and Experiences

The new president will have a deep commitment to the community college mission, vision and values. This transformational, student-centered leader will lead confidently through rapid change and position Stark State as a model for innovation, workforce responsiveness and student success.

An earned doctoral degree from a regionally accredited or Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) recognized institution; and a minimum of 10 years of progressively responsible experience in a higher education institution, including demonstrated success in a senior-level administrator role, are required. Community or technical college leadership experience with demonstrated workforce development and employer engagement success is strongly preferred, and experience teaching in a higher education setting (or equivalent experience), reflecting an understanding of faculty roles and student-centered instruction, is preferred.

Additional leadership attributes, skills and experiences include:

- The ability to be agile and lead through the rapid changes impacting higher education, particularly in community colleges in the state of Ohio.
- A deep understanding of an open access community college with co-located campuses and centers that serve individual counties within an institution's service area.
- Demonstrated experience in strategic planning and the capacity to build a shared vision and key strategies to support a unified focus and innovation, increase an institution's footprint, and address current as well as emerging educational and workforce development needs of various communities.
- Evidence of being student centered and providing an accessible, affordable college education with a strong focus on academic quality and student success; a track record of advancing strategic enrollment management initiatives with successful results.
- Exceptional skill in financial planning, stewardship and decision-making that maintains a course toward long-term fiscal stability and sustainability of an institution.
- High emotional intelligence and compassion for colleagues to support an institution's organizational health and positive work environment, employee retention, and work/life balance.



- A collaborative, inspirational leadership style, demonstrated through the ability to motivate, listen, be visible and approachable, and actively engage with all stakeholders to build trust and nurture a strong sense of community.
- Demonstrated experience of successful working, collegial relationships with a Board of Trustees or a similar governing body.
- A deep understanding of shared governance and experience in developing productive working relationships with faculty, staff and administrators to support academic excellence, student services, collaborative decision-making and effective communication across the college.
- Evidence of building successful relationships and partnerships with community organizations, business and industry, K-12 school systems, and other educational institutions to create sustainable support for various student populations, workforce development programs and economic development within communities.
- The proven ability to be a key leader in the community who represents an institution and tells a compelling story to garner increased support for the institution.
- Demonstrated experience navigating the political environment and serving as a strong, persuasive institutional advocate with elected officials and government entities at the local, state and national levels.
- A track record of fundraising and working with Foundations to develop relationships with donors, increase major gifts, endowments and financial resources that support students, programs and an institution; ability to support and lead other resource development efforts, such as grants.
- A working knowledge of emerging technology, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), relevant to supporting academic programming, student learning and administrative functions; the capacity to remain current and support assessment of emerging technologies for appropriate use in an educational setting.
- Effective and clear oral and written communication skills, including the ability to listen to different groups and communicate effectively with and relate to a wide range of stakeholders.
- Strong critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and the ability to utilize quantitative and qualitative data to inform decisions.
- Professional and personal integrity and ethical conduct.



NOMINATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

AGB Search is pleased to assist Stark State College with this Presidential Search.

To ensure full consideration, applications should be received by July 24, 2026. Application materials should be submitted in PDF format through the AGB Search portal at:

[President – Stark State College](#) and must include the following:

- A letter of interest addressing the leadership agenda and qualifications identified in the profile;
- A curriculum vitae; and
- The contact information for five professional references, including email address, phone number, and relationship to the candidate. No references will be contacted without prior explicit approval.

Please direct nominations, confidential inquiries or any questions regarding the application process to **StarkStatePres@agbsearch.com** or one of the AGB Search consultants listed below.

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