**Implementing scaffolding as a campus-wide strategy: A High-level plan for addressing
student preparation gaps**

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In the fall 2024 semester at Mohawk Valley Community College, English 1: Composition saw a student success rate of just 63%. Concepts in Mathematics saw a similar rate with 60% of students passing (Institutional Research Office, 2025). This data continues the trends established over the past several years, especially the terms since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. These low pass rates follow similar trends through the introductory courses in many majors across the college as well. Unfortunately, success rates for the few remaining developmental math and English courses at the college are worse with Basic Writing seeing just a 34% success rate and Fundamental College Math 1 slightly better at 50% (Institutional Research Office, 2025). We are not supporting our students in the post-COVID landscape as well as we could be. These challenges aren't unique to MVCC—community colleges nationwide are seeing similar struggles, especially among students who were hit hardest by the pandemic. New times call for new ideas. To see the change we want for our students and our institution, we must take a holistic approach to improving academic student support. Scaffolding instruction—a research-backed strategy that provides temporary, targeted support that can be applied across academic disciplines—offers a practical campus-wide solution to help more students succeed while supporting MVCC's goals for student completion and inclusive excellence.

Instructional Scaffolding, or, as Grand Canyon University (2023) called it, the "I do. We do. You do" model, was developed as an intentional educational technique in the 1970's. The name refers to the supportive structure used in building and construction trades, a tool that provides temporary and structured support for those working on a skill or task. The technique engages Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. This psychological concept, as described by

McLeod (2025) "…refers to the gap between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance." Vygotsky theorized that young people can learn successfully by cooperating with and watching others. ZPD notes that students learn best not when adopting or honing skills to solve problems with pre-determined answers, but in creative problem-solving tasks wherein they can build upon existing knowledge and skills, hence the scaffold metaphor in practical modern application (McLeod, 2025).

Scaffolding is already a part of instruction in many courses at MVCC. In ESOL courses, one professor engages ZPD-based scaffolding in all levels of Composition, grammar, listening & Speaking, and reading instruction for English Language Learners. The instructor specifically references the metacognitive benefits of carefully structured scaffolding, engaged with ZPD framework when explaining his curriculum design that includes strategic repetition toward student success (D. Elseth, personal communication, March 15, 2023). In EN090: Basic Writing Skills, the college's remaining developmental writing course, scaffolding is front and center. The primary course instructor has recently completed a manuscript of a teaching guide focused on storytelling in the composition classroom. In her text, she noted that even storytelling should follow the basic principles of scaffolding, in that instructors can demonstrate writing from experience through personal storytelling. She explains that students need modelling to understand not only the mechanics of composition but also in trusting their own stories have value and are worthy of sharing (Severs, 2025). Principles of scaffolding, even if not explicitly labelled as such, are part of instruction in many other courses in the School of Humanities including Effective Speech, Creative Writing, Oral & Written Communication, Practical & Professional Written Communications, and all world language courses including those in American Sign Language.

Scaffolding is easy to envision in writing and language learning courses but can be applied across the college in most disciplines. Gasaway (2022) summarized a study in mathematics instruction that compared the learning trajectory of students presented with a complex problem without scaffolding to the learning trajectory of students scaffolded into the complex problem with simpler versions of the problem to build confidence and practice. The results showed that students who were guided through scaffolding were able to solve the final problem in 90 seconds on average, versus 5 minutes for the students given the final problem immediately (Gasaway, 2022). On a University of San Diego blog, Nance (n.d.) wrote about how scaffolding could work in natural sciences. The blogger stated that breaking down a scientific concept into smaller pieces, visualizing the concept in small chunks, and then taking an open-book quiz can develop understanding more efficiently and with better recall and retention than by assigning a chapter of reading alone (Nance, n.d.). Instructors and administrators in skilled trades instruction sometimes do not see themselves in traditional pedagogies. However, scaffolding is the bread and butter of skilled trades instruction. Sandu (2025) suggested that engaging the ZPD framework is not a lofty high-minded academic strategy, but a practical one in vocational education. For vocational education and skilled trade instruction, scaffolding can include task-performance modeling, verbal guidance during first attempts, offering feedback on performance in the form of questioning, and gradually shifting and reducing support over multiple practice attempts (Sandu, 2025). Indeed, it is hard to think of a discipline at MVCC that would not benefit from scaffolding.

Implementing scaffolding as a routine instructional strategy aligns with Mohawk Valley Community College's Strategic Plan. The first pillar of MVCC's Catalyst 2020 Strategic Plan (2024) is: Increase Student Completion. Implementing scaffolding across the college as a

primary instructional strategy is laser-focused on this goal. Given the research on the efficacy of Scaffolding and its potential to bridge preparedness gaps and bridge student learning to new skills, all sub-categories of this strategic plan pillar (fall to fall retention rate, graduation rate, student success rate) should be positively impacted. The second pillar of the plan is: Strengthen the Educational Pipeline. Implementing scaffolding as a college-wide instructional strategy works toward this goal both in bridging gaps in preparation of students coming to MVCC from diverse high school settings and can help increase successful transfer rates to SUNY and other four-year institutions because of increased skills attainment and ability to apply knowledge and understanding across disciplines that scaffolding develops. Finally, Advance Diversity and Inclusiveness, the third pillar of Catalyst 2020, would be greatly and positively impacted by scaffolding implementation. This pillar of the strategic plan includes focus on increasing support, recruitment, and retention of students age 25 and above. While much of the research on scaffolding focuses on K-12 learning, the same principles should hold true across the educational pipeline. In addition to preparation diversity in where returning adult students completed high school, this population faces increased rates of lack of confidence in academic skills. Engaging the Zone of Proximal Development can help re-acclimate adult students to higher learning with encouragement and modeling by instructors and peers. This strategic plan pillar also includes a focus on Universal Design for Learning and the creation of related gateway course toolkits. Scaffolding should be included as a primary instructional strategy in these toolkits.

Research heavily suggests that intentional and carefully planned implementation of scaffolding techniques positively impacts student learning across the board. Of utmost urgency is the impact the strategy can have within an equity-mindset. Manuel (2025) studied the effect of scaffolding on success rates of students with disabilities, and results included drastic

improvement in student success with thoughtful and targeted implementation. The researcher concluded that scaffolding is successful because it "…creates an environment that recognizes and respects the unique learning pathways of students with learning disabilities (Manuel, 2025)." MVCC prides itself on its level of support available to all students and we are especially proud of the services we offer for students with disabilities. The Office of Accessibility Resources leads the college's implementation of student rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act. This work includes evaluating and arranging classroom and testing accommodations for individual students and educating and training faculty and staff on full and proper adherence with the ADA and individual student accommodation plans. The office maintains a website outlining ADA regulations and houses a collection of faculty and staff resources. Training videos and documentation for scaffolding implementation and training could join this portion of the college website.

The Office for Accessibility Resources (OAR) is just one stakeholder required for successful implementation and institutionalization of the selected instructional strategy. The Center for Inclusive Teaching Excellence (CITE) collects and shares pedagogy elements and faculty-specific training elements for the college. Expanding on the OAR website materials, CITE can help bring the benefits of scaffolding integration to all students in all disciplines through hosting brown-bag learning sessions, establishing communities of practice around scaffolding and classroom equity, and housing training and curriculum materials for easy access by full time and adjunct faculty alike. Academic deans will be instrumental in establishing scaffolding as an institutional priority and will best help implementation by including training and discussion of the implementation at periodic academic school meetings and reinforcing faculty focus on other available training resources. Once the strategy is institutionalized with the

blessing of the Board of Trustees, deans will need to devise syllabus language on scaffolding and work with their faculty on making the statement a meaningful and standard part of every course syllabus. Besides students and the faculty, other stakeholder groups include upper college administration, K-12 school partners, and 4-year transfer partners. In addition to training necessary for embedding scaffolding strategies into curriculum, training on assessment is necessary so that all at the college can see for themselves the levels of success we see and adjust strategies accordingly during and beyond implementation. This will require training from the Office of Institutional Research, supported by the Vice Presidents of Learning & Academic Affairs and Student Affairs.

Costs are always an understandable concern for a public institution of higher learning, and MVCC is no different. Many of the costs associated with implementing scaffolding across the college can be absorbed into existing operating budgets. OAR and CITE already maintain web collateral that can be leveraged toward highlighting the strategy implementation and assessment results. The Office of the President hosts opening day programming at the start of each academic year with each event highlighting a new initiative or theme for the college. The 2026-2027 academic year could kick off with a day-long series of programming to launch the initiative and help faculty and staff at all levels of the institution see their role in the plan. A Data Summit is held at the start of each spring term at MVCC. The Spring 2028 Data Summit would be an excellent opportunity to review success data collected over three semesters of progress and begin planning for the next iteration of the initiative. New costs associated with the implementation could include: release time or extra compensation for faculty planning and work during non-contract times, printed collateral facing all levels of stakeholders, and perhaps hiring of new staff to aid in curriculum and process implementation.

Gateway course student success data from fall 2024 clearly demonstrates that current instructional approaches are insufficient to meet the needs of MVCC's diverse student population, with success rates of 63% in English Composition and 60% in foundational mathematics courses indicating significant room for improvement. Research supports scaffolding as an effective instructional strategy that can be implemented across disciplines to address the preparation gaps that have become more pronounced in the post-COVID educational environment. The strategy's alignment with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory and its demonstrated success in ESOL, math, natural sciences, and skilled trades instruction makes scaffolding a comprehensive solution that directly supports MVCC's Strategic Plan. Successful implementation of scaffolding will require collaboration among key stakeholders including the Office for Accessibility Resources, the Center for Inclusive Teaching Excellence, academic deans, and the Office of Institutional Research, in addition to buy-in from faculty and students. The strategy's apparent effectiveness in supporting students with disabilities and adult learners makes it especially well-suited to MVCC's commitment to inclusive excellence and accessible education. Through thoughtful planning and systematic implementation, scaffolding can become an integral part of MVCC's academic culture, helping to improve student success rates while maintaining the college's reputation for providing comprehensive support for all students.

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