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### **For Immediate Release: Sandhills Community College Wins LERN International Award**

Sandhills Community College, Hamlet, N.C., received a 2018 International Award for best programming from the Learning Resources Network (LERN), the world's largest lifelong learning and continuing education association.

The award was announced during the 2017 LERN Annual Conference in Portland, Oregon. The conference was attended by nearly 700 lifelong learning and continuing education professionals from across North America.

We have a shortage of college graduates, in both Canada and the U.S. The Bridge to College program targeted recent high school grads with no college plans and offered an event to let them know about the benefits and how to get accepted.

According to research on education goals, students have decided by eighth grade whether they plan to attend college or not. Increasingly, young adults are avoiding college because of high costs and questions about the value of post-secondary education.

Bridge to College and Careers, addressed this problem head-on. Targeting graduating high school students with no clear goals for college, they offered a free eight-day introduction to college life. Working with other units on campus, the high school, and community agencies, the program provided information on how to navigate the campus environment as well as tours of local businesses and meetings with employers.

Although the initial program was relatively small with only 12 students, half went on to enroll in a curriculum program and three others enrolled in short term career training programs through continuing education.

Providing this kind of mentored experience for students who may not ever have considered post-secondary education can be critical to bringing opportunities to students who may not have been reached otherwise.