

Aligning Partnerships for Student Success

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Keynote address by

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California Community Colleges Board of Governors

Thank you, David. You and Julie have been outstanding partners and we are so grateful for your leadership.

I am honored by your invitation to deliver the keynote address this morning.

At the Board of Governors, we operate somewhat in the background, so being before this audience of more than 1,000 devoted faculty and administrators is a very special opportunity.

I really like the theme of this meeting. It says it all: Aligning Partnerships for Student Success.

We on the Board of Governors so value the partnership we share with the Academic Senate, the Chief Instructional Officers, the Chief Student Services Officers, the Association of Occupational Educators, the Chancellor's Office, and other colleagues.

For me personally, it is a privilege to work on behalf of students and communities throughout California as a member of the Board of Governors and at Pasadena City College, where I served as an elected trustee.

I am going to share some thoughts on various issues before the system, but thought it might be helpful if I gave you some personal background.

My father is an immigrant. In fact he is a refugee. He and his parents fled the Nazi occupation of Austria in 1938. They arrived in this country without speaking English.

My dad grew up sleeping on the sofa in a one-bedroom apartment in a working class neighborhood in Brooklyn where his Dad worked in a restaurant.

Fortunately, my dad found a technical college, Brooklyn College of Pharmacy, and learned a profession that enabled him to support our family.

My mother grew up in the Midwest. She came from a broken family and was married and divorced at 20. She married again, divorced and was a single mom with two kids at 28.

She married my dad a year later and had two more children. (Thank goodness the third marriage worked out and they're still together).

As a young woman, she loved to read and loved to learn. But her life situation did not allow her to even consider college until the U.S. Navy brought our family to Southern California in the early 1960s.

In Orange County, she discovered the local community college. Golden West College. Once she had access, there was no stopping her. She enrolled in classes and pursued her dreams.

With gratitude for the opportunities they had been given and an earnest desire to tackle the injustices they witnessed, my parents both got involved in politics.

My dad was elected mayor of our hometown. Years later and with the support of the faculty, my mom was elected to the Coast Community College District Board of Trustees.

That is the environment in which I was raised and I have devoted my professional career and public service to higher education.

As I mentioned earlier, for a dozen years I served as an elected governing board member of the Pasadena Area Community College District where I served two terms as board president.

I am proud that PCC is widely regarded among the state's very best community colleges. It ranks near the top in virtually every category, including:

- Transfer to 4-year colleges.
- Awarding of associates degrees.
- Career and technical education certificates awarded.

In addition, I have been member of the leadership team at the University of Southern California as assistant dean for USC's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and as managing director of USC's Center on Communication Leadership & Policy.

I have seen firsthand the power of education to transform lives, including my own. I see it every day at colleges and universities across the state.

With more than two million students, ours is the largest system of higher education in the nation.

The Board of Governors sets the policy and provides guidance for the 72 districts and 113 colleges which constitute our system.

Now, for the first time in memory, all 17 seats on the board are filled.

We have two outstanding faculty representatives, Joseph Bielanski from Berkeley City College and Jeff Burdick from Clovis Community College; a classified senate representative, Danny Hawkins from San Jose Evergreen; a student

representative; along with an impressive, diverse and devoted group of appointees who represent the public. They include leaders from health care, finance, the technology sector, labor, and public policy, among other fields. I should note that each member is a volunteer. We do not draw a salary for service on the board of governors and receive no benefits.

We do receive \$100 per day when we meet, which is bimonthly, usually in Sacramento.

Together we establish standards and monitor performance of local colleges and districts. We are also the body that is the formal point of contact with state and federal agencies, administering funding, awarding contracts and grants.

We also select the chief executive for our state system.

You may have been following our process as we work to recruit a new leader to build on the significant progress we achieved under both Jack Scott and Brice Harris.

Today, we are very fortunate to have Erik Skinner serve as chancellor while we conduct the search.

As I have told Chancellor Skinner on several occasions, this is not the time to be a placeholder. We are counting on his knowledge, judgment, leadership and strategic approach to continue to move the system forward on all fronts.

In addition, as you know, along with Chancellor Skinner, we have an exceptional leadership team in the Chancellor's office that works tirelessly to serve you and the entire system.

When I joined the Board of Governors in 2008, we were at the beginning of the Great Recession. California was suffering from record levels of unemployment, home foreclosure, and business failure.

The demand for education and training was never greater. Yet we were forced to ration education at unprecedented levels.

We cut courses. We cut staff. We deferred maintenance and, most heartbreaking, we deferred dreams by turning away more than half a million of our graduating high school students.

Faced with these daunting challenges, we did exactly what this meeting is all about. We aligned and strengthened partnerships for student success, thanks in large part to everyone here today.

The work of our Student Success Task Force during this austere budget period led to many changes that are improving outcomes.

In addition, the strengthening economy and our close collaboration with the Governor and the State Legislature have helped restore some of the access that had been lost.

Course offerings, both credit and noncredit, are up. Last year we had 367,000 course section offerings, up 10 percent from the previous year.

Importantly, our credit course success rate is climbing, last year reaching 71 percent.

Completion rates in remedial math and English and ESL continue to improve. The number of certificates and degrees awarded is increasing dramatically, last year passing 200,000.

On another core measure, transfers are rebounding. This is in no small measure due to the work you have done with the Associate Degree for Transfer program.

The tireless work of our Academic Senate, working in collaboration with counterparts from California State University, has produced more than 2,000 new transfer majors since 2012.

Last year, 21,000 Associate Degrees for Transfer were conferred by community colleges, nearly double the previous year.

The California Community Colleges and the University of California also are partnering with us to increase transfer.

UC has committed to adding 10,000 more California undergraduates over the next three years, about a third of whom will be transfer students.

Last month we entered into an agreement that will expand outreach and awareness of the UC Transfer Pathways initiative, with particular focus on underserved regions of the state.

I am inspired by the human potential that practitioners like you are able to unleash. For example, earlier this week, I met a student named Omar Rodriguez. His parents were born in Mexico and his dad only had a second grade education.

When Omar was an ESL student in high school, classes were often difficult for him. He struggled in one class so badly, a counselor suggested he shouldn't even think about going to college.

Despite those struggles, Omar ultimately found Irvine Valley College, and received financial help from the Board of Governors Fee Waiver, Pell Grant and Cal Grant.

At IVC, he received support from staff and faculty who refused to let him fail. They inspired him to make the sacrifices necessary to succeed, including a 2-hour commute each way from his home in Corona.

Omar is almost finished with his Associate Degree for Transfer with plans to attend a four-year university (I'm hoping USC). And he doesn't want to end there: He has his eyes set on getting an MBA at Stanford.

Our Student Success Initiative has been moving forward since we launched it in 2011. Its success is made possible by the hard work you do day-in and day-out. You are the ones that help thousands of students like Omar succeed.

With the Student Success Initiative flourishing, we recognized that we needed to follow up with a major new initiative to improve and expand our policies, strategies and practices.

There were many reasons to do so:

- Our nation faces a daunting shortage of skilled workers.
- Many Californians are still being left behind in this economic recovery.
- California Community Colleges are uniquely positioned to address these needs.

To make progress on this front, we commissioned the Strong Workforce Task Force to engage stakeholders in the colleges and in the employer community for input and ideas.

Over the course of a year, the Task Force conducted detailed research and held meetings across the state with industry, labor, academic and other leaders.

This extensive process resulted in the 25 recommendations that we adopted unanimously a few months ago and we have already commenced implementation.

Among the initial steps:

- Our student success scorecard now recognizes “skills builders.” These are especially important for older students –who come to us for 1 or 2 courses to upskill in a way that results in significant wage gains.
- We are sponsoring AB 1892 by Assemblymember Jose Medina to ensure CTE students get a fairer share of financial aid.
- We are continuing efforts to secure funding to meet the high cost of CTE programs. Governor Brown has proposed \$200 million in ongoing funding for these purposes and the Legislature has signaled its strong support. We are optimistic these funds will begin flowing to the colleges next year.
- Plans are underway to give colleges authority to offer stand-alone courses without Chancellor’s Office approval. This will allow you to develop and offer new courses more quickly to better meet student and employer needs.

Over the next few years, these and the rest of the 25 recommendations will be part of the roadmap for our system. Together, we will make tremendous strides in workforce training programs that will benefit California and the nation for generations to come.

I mentioned earlier that we need to seek expanded financial aid for CTE students, but we also need to expand aid for all of our students.

It is no secret that financial aid has not kept pace with the rising costs to attend college.

In 1973 the Cal Grant B Award was \$900.

Adjusted for inflation, today that would equate to more than \$6,000, but we fall far short of that.

To make matters worse, recent research has shown that community college students shoulder the highest “Net” cost of attendance when access to financial aid is factored in. More than the UC’s. More than Cal State.

Community College students make up 65 percent of the college student population but receive only 6 percent of Cal Grant program dollars.

We need to improve and expand the Cal Grant program.

The Board of Governors is sponsoring legislation to increase the Cal Grant B Award, increase number of Competitive Cal Grants, create a Cal Grant C Award for CTE students, and change some of the eligibility requirements.

Specifically, Assembly Bill 1721, also by Assemblymember Medina, would increase the maximum Cal Grant B Award to \$3,000, increase the number of Competitive Cal Grants to 30,000, increase the Cal Grant Transfer Entitlement Award age limit to 31 and allow for a 3-year gap period.

With increasing costs and dwindling financial support, we are placing an entire generation at risk by forcing them into crushing debt that will be a burden to them and their families for decades.

It is no surprise that in this election cycle many students and others in both parties are questioning whether our political system is working for them.

We need this legislation, not just to help students, but to ensure the economic vitality of our entire state.

I will discuss the issue of accreditation a little bit later, but first I want to talk about how seriously the Board of Governors takes accountability and how the Chancellor's Office is supporting the continued improvement of our colleges.

The Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI) which was launched last year is quickly expanding opportunities for professional development, technical assistance, and other support for college faculty, staff, and administrators.

Across the state, regional workshops have been offered to support innovation and improvement in a variety of areas, including:

- Basic Skills instruction and support.
- Closing achievement gaps.
- Enrollment management.
- Equal Employment Opportunity.
- Inmate Education.
- Using data to improve CTE programs.

Much of this training has been conducted by exceptional educators from across the system, including many who are in this room today.

As one college president I admire put it. You have a gift. You are our society's experts in how humans learn. You know what works. You know what it takes to transform an individual. To change a life.

We need to tap into your tremendous expertise. IEPI is helping to leverage and disseminate that knowledge about effective practices.

IEPI has also launched Partnership Resource Teams—an innovative strategy in which a college can ask for assistance in improving some aspects of its operation.

A team of experts is assembled and deployed to provide a collegial, constructive review and recommend strategies to accomplish the desired improvement.

So far, 35 colleges have benefited from these Partnership Resource Teams. This is another example of our commitment to institutional effectiveness. Please continue to engage in IEPI activities, trainings, or Partnership Resource Teams.

Finally, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the significant challenges that our system is having with our current accreditor, ACCJC.

From the U.S. Department of Education to the California Department of Finance to our own Task Force on Accreditation, the problems have been clearly documented. We have undertaken a careful review and we support the recent move by our system's CEOs to engage the ACCJC and drive for needed improvements.

Let me be clear, we embrace rigorous accreditation. Setting high standards and being held accountable is how we make ourselves better. How we serve our students better.

That is why we as a Board of Governors acted on our own to establish what we believe to be the most robust accountability framework of any system of higher education in the nation.

The process of peer review focused on continual improvement is a great model and we need to stay true to it.

Because we all know there are times when colleges in our state have fallen short of standards, the viability of the institution was threatened and students were harmed. While we are expanding resources for institutional effectiveness, we must also have serious consequences for institutions who consistently do not meet standards.

For example, I am growing increasingly impatient with the wide disparity in full-time faculty hiring across the state. We need to do a much better job ensuring students receive more of their instruction from full-time faculty who offer office hours, spend time collaborating with colleagues, are accessible to students and staff and building a vibrant learning community on each of our campuses.

We owe it to our students and state to work aggressively to ensure colleges are effectively run, quality instruction is consistently delivered, and students from all backgrounds are succeeding.

We will remain focused on the metrics that demonstrate student success. The State Legislature has noticed. So has the Governor. They have responded by providing increasing levels of funding as the state's revenues have recovered. That confidence is a precious commodity and we must work hard every day to earn that trust.

Thank you for this opportunity and, more importantly, for the work you do every day to serve Omar and the two million California Community College our students.

The Board of Governors and California Community Colleges are moving forward -- and this conference is proof that we are moving forward together.

Thank you and have a great meeting.