

WORKFORCE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

NEWSLETTER

WINTER EDITION • 2026



Dear Colleagues and Partners,

As the Vice Chancellor of Workforce and Economic Development (WEDD), I bear witness to the constant effort of our 116-college system to adapt and innovate to the ever-evolving economic conditions that drive California's world class economy. As we welcome the new year, I am grateful for the commitment of all faculty, staff, and administration who are leading the way to pilot and scale practices that align with Vision 2030 and who are expanding access to high-quality career pathways that lead to economic mobility and resilient communities. These efforts are evidenced by the workforce initiatives and programs we highlight in this newsletter that build on California's physical assets, from our eight million acres of agricultural farmland to our vast coastline connecting us to the deep blue sea.

Another important voice was Chancellor Sonya Christian's EdSource article highlighting how California's advancement of Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) is accelerating veterans' academic and career journeys boosting graduation rates by 25%, shortening time to completion, and saving students money.

Looking ahead, WEDD remains focused on supporting the initiatives of our system that build scalable, equitable pathways that respond to regional labor market needs that advance Vision 2030. Whether through new partnerships, targeted investments, or leadership transitions, the work featured in this newsletter reflects a system moving forward together—with intention, coordination, and impact.

Thank you,

Anthony Cordova

Anthony Cordova
Vice Chancellor, Workforce and Economic Development

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WEDD PROGRAM UPDATES

Access the latest monthly insights, news and progress reports regarding Workforce and Economic Development on the [Program Updates and Newsletters](#) page.



California Community Colleges

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

STATEWIDE CONVENING ON AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Just before the new year, Jobs for the Future, the Employment Development Department, and the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency hosted a Statewide Convening on Agricultural Workforce. The event brought together over 100 community organizations, training providers, and state agencies committed to helping farm working communities achieve economic advancement and job equality. Attendees joined an interactive day of journey mapping, analyzing the ecosystem of existing services, and developing recommendations for a more coordinated and comprehensive statewide strategy for supporting farm workers and the agricultural field in a time of transition.

The convening fulfilled an objective of an [\\$11 million investment](#) by the state to prepare farmworkers to advance in the industry and obtain good-quality jobs with family-sustaining wages. WEDD Vice Chancellor Cordova participated on a panel discussing how community colleges are partnering with the 12 awarded organizations to address farmworkers' unique needs while adapting to ongoing changes in the agriculture industry. Programs will provide hands-on training in industry-specific skills, including climate-smart technologies and techniques in sustainability.



(PHOTO - Panelists Javier Romero, Kaina Pereira, Parina Parikh, and Anthony Cordova)

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EFFECTIVE POSTSECONDARY CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION



(PHOTO - CTE Panel on Workforce Development at Santa Ana College)

Last December, the California Assembly Select Committee on Effective Postsecondary CTE and Workforce Development Programs held its first hearing at Santa Ana College.

Vice Chancellor Cordova participated as a panelist to update the committee on initiatives being led by community colleges including Dual Enrollment, Credit for Prior Learning, Strong Workforce Program, and Apprenticeships. On Credit for Prior Learning, he shared that this strategy has already saved more than \$70 million in tuition and time to completion and shared results from the highly successful EMS Corps program. Additionally, Vice Chancellor Cordova requested the Legislature to consider restoring funds for the Strong Workforce Program while maintaining its commitment to the very critical nursing infrastructure program.

A full transcript of the hearing can be found using this link - <https://calmatters.digitaldemocracy.org/hearings/278348>

Assembly Select Committee on Effective Postsecondary Career Technical Education and Workforce Development Programs

December 11, 2025

View Agenda

CURRENTLY DISCUSSING

No Bills Identified

[Download Transcript](#)

Speakers

- ADVOCATE: Matthew Barboza
- Bill Burden
- Clifton Gibson
- Jose Gomez
- STATE AGENCY REPRESENTATIVE: Anthony Cordova

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Mike Feng (Legislator): Well, good morning. Well, good morning. Thank you so much to each and every one of you for being here today. I'd like to call this hearing of the Select Committee on Effective Post Secondary Career Technical Education and Workforce Development Programs to order.

BECAP - UNDER WATER ROBOTICS AT EL CAMINO COLLEGE

El Camino College hosted a Blue Economy & Climate Action Pathways (BECAP) event showcasing the exciting potential of underwater robotics and the expanding opportunities within the Blue Economy. The blue economy encompasses sustainable economic activities that rely on oceans, coasts, and waterways to drive innovation, climate solutions, and job creation while protecting marine ecosystems for future generations.

Attendees had the chance to explore cutting-edge underwater robotics and ROV technology, view demonstration units, and learn about real-world ocean-tech applications like the technology behind remotely operated vehicles (ROVs). Attendees also had the opportunity to engage in discussions on curriculum development, workforce training, regional collaboration, and network with educators, students, and industry partners committed to shaping the future of ocean innovation. This BECAP experience highlighted the growing demand for ocean-related innovation and set the foundation for forming a working group and planning future instructor training opportunities.

As context to this work, the California Community Colleges Board of Governors updated the Climate Action and Sustainability Framework a year ago. The framework is part of Vision 2030 and included setting eight systemwide goals for all 73 districts to measure progress toward 2025, 2030, and 2035 milestones - California's target year for achieving a 100% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions below baseline levels.

To learn more about this program at El Camino College, visit - <https://www.elcamino.edu/academics/areas-of-study/robotics.php>



(PHOTOS -Under Water Robotics Program at El Camino College)

Welcome NEW DEAN



WEDD is pleased to welcome **Dr. Paige Mustain** as the new Dean of Workforce and Economic Development at the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. Dean Mustain oversees the Strong Workforce Program, Strong Workforce K-12, Perkins, and Economic and Workforce Development, bringing more than 15 years of experience advancing equitable access and breaking down structural barriers for workers and learners.

Dean Mustain's commitment to equity is deeply personal. A California community college graduate herself, she credits the system with providing the opportunity and support that shaped her academic and professional journey. Her work is grounded in ensuring that today's learners - especially those facing systemic barriers - have access to meaningful pathways to economic mobility.

Prior to joining the Chancellor's Office, Dean Mustain served as Research Director at Jobs for the Future and as a Researcher with the California Workforce Development Board, where she led implementation and evaluation of major federal and state workforce initiatives. She holds a doctorate from the University of Oxford, with research focused on digital inequality and public-private partnerships in U.S. education, as well as graduate and undergraduate degrees from the University of Massachusetts and UC San Diego.

After living and working across the U.S. and the UK, Dean Mustain is proud to return home as a champion for California's community colleges and workforce system. We are excited to have her leadership advancing WEDD's mission and Vision 2030 goals.

LA FIRE RECOVERY

CONSTRUCTION TRADES LAB - PASADENA CITY COLLEGE

This month Pasadena City College hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for its new Construction Trades Lab, a partnership between Pasadena City College, the LA Rises Initiative, and San Gabriel Valley Habitat for Humanity. Dean Linda Bermudez joined representatives from nonprofit organizations, education, and labor groups including California Labor and Workforce Development Agency Secretary Stewart Knox and representatives of elected officials U.S. Rep. Judy Chu, state Sen. Sasha Perez, Assemblymembers John Harabedian and Mike Fong, and Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger.

In January 2025, the fires destroyed 16,000 structures, according to figures cited during the event. By the time the Eaton fire was contained on Jan. 31, 2025, more than 10,000 homes, businesses, schools and places of worship had been destroyed or damaged, officials said. Pasadena City College is located minutes from neighborhoods devastated by the fires.

This milestone reflects the college's Skills to Rebuild Initiative and its continued commitment to preparing students for meaningful careers in construction, engineering, and the skilled trades, while also equipping them to help rebuild and strengthen our community in the aftermath of the Eaton Fire. The Construction Trades Lab will be an innovative indoor/outdoor hybrid facility designed to advance workforce development, support regional recovery, and expand strong, industry-aligned pathways for students.



APPRENTICESHIPS

This winter, the Chancellor's Office continues to strengthen California's apprenticeship ecosystem through new funding opportunities, statewide learning, and practical tools designed to support colleges in building high-quality, equitable earn-and-learn pathways.

DATA DRIVES APPRENTICESHIP LEARNING LAB: IMPROVING TRACKING AND REPORTING

In December, the Chancellor's Office and the Foundation (FoundationCCC) for California Community Colleges convened college apprenticeship practitioners from across the state in Sacramento for the **Data Drives Apprenticeship Learning Lab**. The event underscored the Chancellor's Office's commitment to supporting colleges in strengthening their data and reporting processes to ensure program compliance, demonstrate outcomes, and inform future investments.

UPCOMING SUPPORT AND ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Apprenticeship Team, in partnership with FoundationCCC, continues to provide technical assistance and peer learning opportunities:

- Register now for the [Statewide Convening on Community College Apprenticeship Program Creation & Expansion](#) on **March 19–20, 2026**, in **Costa Mesa**. This engaging, informative two-day convening is designed to support California Community College apprenticeship stakeholders at all levels of designing, implementing, and expanding Registered Apprenticeship Programs that meet the State's evolving workforce needs.
- **Virtual Office Hours:** Held on the **2nd and 4th Tuesdays** of each month from **2:00 to 3:00p.m.**, including focused office hours on timely apprenticeship topics.
- **Apprenticeship Community on the Vision Resource Center:** Connect with faculty, staff, and administrators developing and scaling apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs across the state.



(PHOTO - Data Drives Apprenticeship Learning Lab)



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SUCCESS STORY: EXPANDING CALIFORNIA'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH WORKFORCE THROUGH APPRENTICESHIP

The Catalyst for Wellness in Community (CWC) Apprenticeship Program is an innovative partnership between the Chancellor's Office, Chabot–Las Positas Community College District, and the California Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI). This program seeks to build on the HCAI Certified Wellness Coach model to develop a statewide apprenticeship program and reflects the Chancellor's Office's continued commitment to advancing earn-and-learn pathways that advance both workforce equity and community wellbeing. The Catalyst Center has released a new white paper, "An Apprenticeship Model for California's Behavioral Health Workforce", that provides additional program information.



Welcome - NEW ASSISTANT VICE CHANCELLOR

IOANNA IATRIDIS

WEDD is thrilled to announce the addition of a new Assistant Vice Chancellor, **Ioanna Iatridis** to the team.

Ms. Iatridis, known to her friends and colleagues as “Yanna,” comes to the Chancellor’s Office from her most current position serving as Interim Assistant Superintendent/Vice President of Instruction at Shasta College where she provided operational and strategic leadership to instruction, prior to which as Associate Vice President of Economic and Workforce Development she was responsible for external stakeholder relations and the areas of Center of Excellence, Strong Workforce, Senior Adult Education, Employer Engagement, Employer Partnerships, College Corps, the Career Café, and Marketing/Communication/Public Relations, with a budget exceeding \$19M annually.

WEDD is excited to welcome Ioanna back as she previously spent time at the Chancellor’s Office in 2021 as Dean overseeing the administration and management of the Perkins, SWP and K12SWP programs. In addition to the most current position mentioned, Ms. Iatridis held a variety of roles within the community college system as Dean of Health Sciences and University Programs at Shasta College, Dean of Career Technical Education and Workforce Development at Woodland Community College, and Associate Professor in Business and Accounting and Program Manager for Yolo County Office of Education. Outside of higher education Ms. Iatridis has also held positions in the private sector as Vice President of Marketing & Product Management and General Manager for Ameritech Communications, Inc., she also spent time as an Independent Consultant, where she consulted start-up businesses and existing enterprises on business development, client services, strategic planning, organizational development, staffing, sales and marketing.



Ioanna’s desire to help North State communities is exemplified through her involvement with the Redding Chamber of Commerce, as well as serving as a board member of the SMART Center and Shasta Family YMCA. Ioanna brings with her depth and breadth of leadership experience, organizational development, as well as supporting staff cohesion. She has made significant contributions along every aspect of her career journey, and has done so with vibrant energy, a strong work ethic, and an ability to lead with clear direction and compassion.

Ms. Iatridis holds a Master of Business Administration degree from Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana and a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology and Humanities from Valparaiso University in Valparaiso, Indiana.

Ioanna and her husband of 33 years, also a Greek immigrant, have two daughters—one practicing law in Chicago and the other in Texas’s Health and Wellness industry. When she’s not traveling across the North State in support of her college and department, Ioanna enjoys reading and traveling world. Please reach out and give Ioanna a warm WEDD welcome.

STUDENT SUCCESS - LUPE DURAN (*FIRE Foundry Program*)



(PHOTO - Lupe Duran)

Lupe Duran lost his dog and his home in the catastrophic Tubbs Fire. But amid the death and destruction that rained down on his hometown of Santa Rosa, he found a sense of community and a calling: “I want to be on an engine, fighting fire,” he says.

After the fire, Duran enrolled in and completed College of Marin’s FIRE Foundry program and received his EMT certification from that school, allowing him to get a jump on a firefighting career. He then graduated from the Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC) Fire Academy in December and received his associate degree in fire science and has since accepted a job as a part-time inspector with the Petaluma Fire Department. He still needs to obtain his paramedic’s certificate, a necessity for him to achieve his goal of serving his community as a life-saving firefighter.

Duran, 30, was taking welding courses at a community college in 2017 when the Tubbs Fire exploded through the city, killing 22 people and destroying more than 6,000 homes. He’d been living with his father in a duplex adjacent to the Coffey Park neighborhood, which suffered the worst of the fatal firestorm. Duran had gone to pick up his girlfriend from her job in Rohnert Park, and the two of them had pulled off U.S. Highway 101 to enjoy the warm evening breeze at Taylor Mountain Regional park when they noticed an orange glow emanating from the hills. When he found out the scorching had begun, Duran called his father and his sisters to make sure they were okay.

“By the time I got home, the fire had already moved downhill, and there was no getting back in,” Duran says. “The fire had taken everything out,” including the duplex where Duran lived with his father and one of his sisters. “It moved very quickly, and we basically had nothing. I was not even able to get my dog.”

In the days that followed, Duran says he was struck by what he saw in others who—like him—were stranded in evacuation centers, having lost most if not all of their material history, but who still pulled themselves together to help their fellow fire victims.

“Seeing people in the same situation as me, seeing the community come together, seeing people bring stuff to the shelter—underwear, toothpaste, the basic necessities—it was very inspirational to me,” Duran says. “I’d never before felt a sense of community.”

Duran started volunteering himself, helping the stranded navigate the processes of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. What he really wanted to do was face off with the fire firsthand, but he knew he didn’t have the qualifications to rush to the front lines. In the smoke and the haze, however, Duran found direction.

He dropped out of the welding program and found work doing fuel reduction around private homes. He enrolled in fire science classes at SRJC. In 2022, he discovered the FIRE Foundry Program operated by the College of Marin in conjunction with the Marin County Fire Department, Conservation Corps North Bay, the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority and the Marin Professional Firefighters union. One of the foundry’s aims, he learned, was to diversify the firefighting workforces in the region.

The FIRE Foundry Program and other community college efforts to train students for fire science careers are aligned with the California Community College Chancellor’s Office’s Vision 2030, a strategic action plan aimed at addressing climate resiliency and other global issues, increasing equity and access to education and providing better economic opportunities.

The program put Duran into the field as a seasonal employee with the Marin County Fire Department and paid him good money to chop trees, thin brush and yank out Scotch broom and other invasive species with his hands. On the rural-urban interface, he educated the public on how to reduce fire danger. He took EMT classes at the College of Marin, paid for by the FIRE Foundry. He tested fire prevention products at the Berkeley Disaster Lab. He interned at PG&E’s Berkeley Climate Conference and helped his team win first place in a wildfire suitability model. The academy followed, and it led to his current job with the Petaluma FD.

STUDENT SUCCESS - LUPE DURAN

Daniel Bull, SRJC Fire Academy coordinator, says Duran distinguished himself as a squad leader at the academy: “His squad was very detailed and performed well under his leadership. He made sure their needs were met and that they did what had to be done to be prepared.”

Bull says that several of the academy’s students have been inspired to public service careers because of their personal experiences in the Tubbs Fire and other disasters. “We have two or three here right now who lost their homes in Coffey Park, similar to Lupe.”

Bull notes the academy is well-respected in the industry: “Fire departments and organizations know our graduates are well trained and have a strong foundation as they begin their careers.”

Next up for Duran: paramedic training, and then a job on a fire engine, hopefully in Santa Rosa.

“I’ve got my foot in the door,” Duran says.

For more information about the College of Marin’s FIRE Foundry Program and Santa Rosa Junior College’s Fire Academy, visit www.firefoundry.org or www.pstc.santarosa.edu/firefighter-academy.



SUBMIT YOUR STORY

Use this [form](#) to submit your story to the story bank!

STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

Do you have a success story you would like to share with us? We would love to hear about it! Use this form to submit your story for our growing list of students who are making a difference and achieve greatness as they continue their journey after attending our incredible community colleges.

IMPACTFUL PROJECTS

CHANCELLOR CHRISTIAN ON MILITARY EXPERIENCE AS CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING

Chancellor Christian outlined a clear framework on the importance of clearing hurdles for providing college credit for prior (CPL) military experience. In the 2024-25 academic year alone, over 34,000 veterans and 10,000 active-duty and other military students attended California community colleges. By offering credit for prior experience, our military students and veterans can reduce the time to program completion, save money, and have the opportunity to earn higher wages and reenter the labor workforce more quickly than without CPL.

Read the opinion piece: “[Don’t Fight Veterans on Earning College Credit for their Military Experience.](#)”

IMPACTFUL PROJECTS

HEALTHY SCHOOL FOOD PATHWAYS INITIATIVE - CHEF ANN FOUNDATION

In November, the College Coalition Convening: A Kitchen-to-Classroom Experience with the Healthy School Food Pathway (HSFP) program brought together community college leaders, the Chef Ann Foundation, and the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office for an immersive, hands-on day in Monterey Bay. The convening included a live scratch-cooking HSFP kitchen tour, as well as statewide strategy and workforce development sessions.

The Healthy School Food Career Pathway Program strengthens the pipeline of skilled professionals in school nutrition and culinary careers by connecting education with real-world workforce needs. Through faculty coalitions, course alignment, and innovative pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship models, the program expands access to career pathways, builds faculty capacity, and equips students with the skills, credentials, and experience needed to succeed. By fostering collaboration between all 116 community colleges, industry partners, and the Chef Ann Foundation, this initiative not only advances equitable opportunities for learners but also supports healthier, more sustainable food systems for California schools.

This program was designed as a CPL and work-experience framework for culinary/nutrition students. It aligns community college courses with Chef Ann Foundation pre-apprenticeship curriculum to create equitable pathways for students to enter high-demand food careers, strengthens faculty and institutional capacity, and ensures California schools have the talent they need to deliver nutritious meals that support student success and community well-being. To learn more, visit the [Workforce Innovation Labs](#) page, and the [Chef Ann Foundation](#) website.



(PHOTOS - Dr. Linda Bermudez at the Kitchen-to-Classroom Experience)

CALIFORNIA YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP SUMMIT



(PHOTO - Youth Apprenticeship Summit Announcement Facebook [Photo](#))

In January, The California Community College Chancellor's Office, Jobs for the Future, CareerWise, NextGen California, and other state, education and workforce leaders participated in the California Youth Apprenticeship Summit. The purpose of this event is to advance a shared vision for expanding high-quality youth apprenticeships across California.

Immediately following the adjournment of the California Youth Apprenticeship Committee meeting, Summit participants explored the practical application of the California Youth Apprenticeship Committee (CYAC) recommendations, including the proposed Career Apprenticeship Bridge (CAB), and approaches to embedding apprenticeship-connected learning into high schools through sequenced, credit-bearing work-based learning and aligned CTE pathways. The summit also addressed legislative and system alignment, with analysis of SB 845 and AB 805 and discussion of how the recommendations align with the CTE Model Curriculum Framework as well as Vision 2030.

The culmination of the discussions highlighted how youth apprenticeships can expand access to meaningful careers with clear, aligned framework to make it easier for employers to invest in developing talent; system alignment that breaks down silos across government, education, and workforce systems; and dedicated professionals who bridge the complexity of apprenticeships by helping employers, educators, and youth come together in ways that scale quality and impact.

IMPACTFUL PROJECTS

CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND ALTASEA AT THE PORT OF LOS ANGELES MOU

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office and AltaSea at the Port of Los Angeles, signed a [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#) this month formalizing a statewide partnership to expand education-to-employment pathways in the blue economy. The agreement advances Vision 2030 and the system's Climate Action and Sustainability Framework by aligning workforce development, curriculum, research, and industry engagement around emerging ocean-based climate solutions.

Through this collaboration, community colleges will connect students—particularly those from historically underrepresented communities—to careers in clean energy, port decarbonization, regenerative aquaculture, and other high-road, AI-resilient fields critical to California's climate and economic future. The partnership also positions California as a global leader in blue economy innovation through coordinated engagement with AltaSea's Deep Blue Decade Initiative.

To learn more about the significance of this partnership and its implications for California's workforce and climate leadership, read this Sacramento Bee opinion piece from Chancellor Sonya Christian and Terry Tamminen, the Chief Executive Officer of AltaSea and former Secretary of the California EPA - <https://www.sacbee.com/opinion/op-ed/article314061601.html>



California Community Colleges