



## Another Stand Out Year

June 23, 2023

Dear Colleagues,

Congratulations on completing another standout year!

Commencements are always such an inspiring and uplifting way to end the year. In all, we awarded 5,146 degrees and certificates to 2,250 students at the beautiful commencement ceremonies.

I was particularly moved by the stories of resilience shared by our student speakers. Grossmont College Student Speaker ShannaRai Diaz graduated with two degrees and a certificate, just a few years after taking a class through the Pathways to Success program as an inmate at Las Colinas Detention and Reentry Facility in Santee. ShannaRai overcame addiction and justice involvement and will be transferring to a four-year university, with plans to earn a bachelor's degree in psychology. Cuyamaca College Student Speaker Benjamin Hart, meanwhile, is the first career education student to give remarks at a commencement. He, too, overcame great odds to earn a degree, having been homeless and struggling with addiction for a decade. Hart earned a degree, and today owns his own auto shop in El Cajon. His [story](#) was featured by 10News.

Also inspiring were the many special cultural and program celebrations this past month. The love and care that went into making these events special for our students was remarkable. Two notable celebrations included the inaugural Grossmont and Cuyamaca College Black/African American graduation celebration that integrated elements of the African culture, as well as the very first AAPI graduation celebration also showcasing the culture of our AAPI communities. The long-standing tradition of the Latinx graduation, as well as CalWorks, and the Nursing Pinning OEPI, EOPS, transfer students, LGBTQ+ students, Justice Scholars, and others were also celebrated at special events.



Seeing members of our community increasingly engaged in campus life has been exciting. A community college thrives on community -- a community where educations are built, career training is advanced, and friendships and professional relationships thrive. I am very proud that we have done a great deal this past year to strengthen community connections even beyond our campuses.

As we get ready to bid farewell to 2022-2023, I wanted to share some **important updates**.

### **Turning Enrollment Around**

There's no doubt the pandemic took a toll on enrollment at our two colleges -- as it did at community colleges around the state and nation.

It gives me great pride to report that we saw enrollment begin to rebound in 2022-2023! Our enrollment increased more than 10% spring 2023, compared to spring 2022, and enrollment for the 2022-2023 academic year exceeded enrollment from the previous academic year by nearly 5%. We have heard a number of times that *enrollment is everyone's business*--I would like to express my appreciation to everyone for this significant turnaround.

As the District continues to carefully plan for a shift in state funding when the hold harmless provision ends in 2025-2026, our leadership is steadfast in planning and managing enrollment growth. Our top priority remains balancing the needs of students and our programs while protecting our District from significant budget reductions in the future. Stay tuned for more detailed information at the Budget Forums planned for early fall.

### **Student Leaders Soar**

One of our students who knows the value of returning to college and building community on campus is Seinna Shaba, outgoing President of the Associated Student Government of Cuyamaca College. This outstanding biology major and student leader, who plans to attend medical school after completing her college education at UCSD, received statewide recognition this year. She was one of just three students to receive the California Community Colleges Board of Governors Student Leadership Award, which celebrated her commitment to student leadership. Seinna is a shining example of what community college can mean for aspiring student leaders.

### **Success in Transferring to SDSU**

One of our key missions is to prepare students for transfer to four-year institutions of higher learning, and both of our colleges are excelling in moving students to San Diego State University. For the sixth year in a row, more Grossmont College students transferred to SDSU in fall 2022, than from any other community college. Cuyamaca College students, meanwhile, achieved the highest transfer acceptance rate into SDSU in the San Diego region in fall 2022, at nearly 74%. This is truly outstanding!

### **Improving Districtwide Governance**

As a leadership team, we are always striving to improve participation in our important work. This past spring, we launched a major effort to rethink the District's participatory governance structure through the state's Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI) process. With widespread input from a team of administrators, faculty, and staff, an action plan was developed to improve the understanding of effective participatory governance, as well as our processes and communication.

A particular focus of this effort is to streamline decision-making, in part by doing a better job distinguishing between operational and policy decisions. Our overall goal is to make participatory governance more agile, inclusive, strategic, and streamlined.

### **Community Engagement**

An overarching goal this past year has been to reengage with our community as we emerge from the pandemic. Over the past year, we hosted several community events, including two significant events on the Grossmont campus in partnership with local and state leaders examining the impacts of homelessness in our community.

Both colleges also held robust open houses this past spring, during which we showcased our many offerings, and provided information on how students can get started advancing their educations and careers. The events featured food, activities and opportunities to tour behind the scenes of several of our programs.

A districtwide effort was initiated to more deeply engage with our community, with a particular focus on our immigrant communities. As part of this work, an effort was launched to strengthen partnerships with a variety of social service and nonprofit organizations that help our most vulnerable community members including refugees, unsheltered residents, and others facing serious life challenges. The effort, called *From Here to Career*, is a partnership between the East Region Adult Education and the TRiO East County Educational Opportunity Center, which is working to build new avenues for community awareness and engagement, and to create pathways to well-paying jobs, with resources and programs to help working people navigate and succeed in college and careers.

### **Equitable Hiring Practices**

In the past year we have made strides in our commitment to equitable hiring practices. Following the receipt of a seed grant in 2021, an Equity in Hiring Task Force, led by equity champions at each college, was formed to examine our hiring practices through an equity lens. The task force developed new and revised hiring practices (PE's) for faculty, classified staff and supervisors/managers which have gone through broad review by the various constituent groups. With the recent onboarding of the District's new Diversity, Equal Opportunity and Title IX Officer, plans are underway to build the EEO/Title IX division of Human Resources to further enhance our hiring practices and ensure full compliance with state and federal law.

### **Improving Systems for Students and Faculty**

A large team throughout the District has been working for the past year to integrate our Student Information Systems to be more intuitive and student friendly. Several significant milestones have been achieved, including:

- The successful transition from the outdated WebAdvisor platform to Colleague Self-Service and the configuration of all faculty rosters in the new Self-Service platform;
- The implementation of a compressed calendar and Multi-Term Registration for summer and fall 2023, enabling students to conveniently plan their academic schedules in advance; the successful migration to multiple new online form solutions, and simplifying various administrative procedures; and
- The implementation of many Hyflex classrooms on both campuses, increasing the opportunities for Hyflex teaching and learning.

These accomplishments reflect the dedication and hard work of a large team working together to improve the overall student experience and ensuring a seamless integration of our systems.

## **Remaining Diligent: Increasing Equitable Access for Undocumented Students**

We remain diligent in advocating for equitable access for our undocumented students. We were disappointed last month when a state bill, AB 680, that would have made it easier for undocumented students to become exempt from nonresident tuition fees, stalled in Sacramento. The bill, which had strong support within California's community colleges, would have helped further the statewide goal of increasing equitable access. While this was a setback for us, we will continue to strongly advocate to eliminate barriers for our undocumented students to ensure equitable access to higher education.

As we wrap up this academic year, thank you again for your remarkable efforts to make our students and district successful.

See you in the fall.

***Lynn***

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