

Testimony of Barbara Baran, Co-Director of the California EDGE Coalition
Assembly Select Committee on the Master Plan for Higher Education in California
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I. Introduction

- The California EDGE Coalition is a non-partisan coalition of business, labor, education, workforce, and community stakeholders. EDGE engages in education, advocacy and technical assistance on state policy and funding for workforce education and training. Our main areas of policy concern have been career technical education, reform of remedial education both in the adult education system and the community colleges, financial aid, and accountability.
- There has been exciting progress on all these issues over the past decade. The Strong Workforce Taskforce and its aftermath is just one important example. Since issuance of the Taskforce recommendations, the Chancellor's Office has made great strides in addressing them. Some examples include efforts to speed up the CTE curriculum approval process, investing in regional partnerships and planning, rebranding CTE to increase awareness, and much more.
- That said, much remains to be done to ensure that California is meeting its workforce needs. Our focus is particularly on "middle skill" jobs, that is jobs that require significant post-high school education but not necessarily a baccalaureate degree. As a result, my remarks primarily will be focused on pre-baccalaureate programs, including the adult education system which is too often forgotten in these conversations. Here are some of our recommendations.

II. Recommendations

- A. Invest in regional strategies with an emphasis on more effectively engaging business and labor and on removing barriers to collaboration among educational segments and institutions.

California is a nation state with multiple different regional economies. To be effective, workforce education and training needs to be responsive to these very different labor markets. For the last decade, policymakers have been trying to address this problem. One outcome is a proliferation of legislatively mandated regional bodies. Unfortunately, many of them fail to effectively engage business and labor and – in fact – the profusion of "tables" at which business

and labor are expected to sit is a problem. Equally importantly, significant structural barriers to collaboration among educational segments and institutions remain. Despite the many regional consortia, real collaboration between segments remains rare. To address these problems, we need to:

- Identify and remove barriers to partnerships among educational segments and institutions, and actively encourage and incentivize regional collaborations.
 - Create viable vehicles for the engagement of business and labor, for example, by effectively collaborating with industry-led organizations.
 - Rationalize regional infrastructures.
 - Focus our investments on programs and industry sectors that data confirm meet local and regional labor market needs.
- B. Recognize career education as a core mission of California's higher education system and work to eliminate the artificial divisions between academic and career education.

California appropriately prides itself on having the most extensive and effective public higher education system in the nation – also the most diverse in its student body. But for a set of complex reasons, our state has undervalued career education. California's career tech programs have not been viewed as integral to the core mission of higher education. As a result, these programs have historically received unpredictable and insufficient funding; CTE faculty have held less sway in determining the policies of their institutions; and these policies have often failed to take into account the impact on CTE. To address these problems, we need to:

- Honor CTE as a core educational mission and work to eliminate artificial divisions between CTE and academic programs both on college campuses and at the state level.
 - Ensure CTE funding streams are adequate and reliable. (High quality CTE programs are often high cost but also high reward in terms of graduates' salaries. Many have for too long relied on erratic grant-based funding.)
 - Ensure that policy implementation takes into account the impact on career tech programs. (For example, we need to ensure that the important effort to implement a guided pathways framework in the CCCs does not have unintended negative consequences for CTE.)
 - Increase investment in work-based learning, including apprenticeships. (Earning while you learn is one way of addressing the financial barriers most students face and a more effective way of learning for many.)
- C. Improve students' access, progress, and outcomes, especially in the case of traditionally underserved populations.

Despite our historic commitment to college for all, Californians face significant barriers to access and success – these include financial, basic skills, and navigational barriers. California's community colleges have the lowest tuition of any in the nation and are tuition-free for low-income students. Yet a recent TICAS study found that the net cost to attend a community college is higher than at UC or CSU since CCC students are less likely to get financial aid that includes living expenses. The majority of CCC students also face significant educational

barriers. Today roughly 80% test into remediation and only a fraction of those leave with a certificate, degree, or transfer. Finally, navigating the educational system is extremely difficult for most students; as a result, many accumulate lots of unnecessary credits and even more simply drop out before achieving a meaningful goal. To address these problems, we need to:

- Set meaningful ambitious goals for improving student outcomes and closing equity gaps both system-wide and for institutions, and use these goals to drive change. (Chancellor Oakley is doing just that.)
- Provide a debt-free pathway for all students to attend college, including community colleges; give every eligible applicant a Cal Grant; increase the size of the grant low-income students receive to cover non-tuition costs; and ensure that CTE students have access to these kinds of financial supports.
- Eliminate the remedial education sinkhole by using multiple measures for student placement and by implementing evidence-based practices that reduce or eliminate the time students spend in remediation, while providing the supports they require.
- Significantly expand navigation assistance to students.

D. Link workforce programs and institutions to create *pathways* to high wage jobs.

To meet the needs of real life students we need to facilitate their ability to gain skills over time and across institutions. Today there are significant institutional barriers to doing so. Exit and entry points across systems are not aligned; lower level courses often don't count toward higher level credentials and degrees; educational segments are competitive rather than collaborative. To address these problems we recommend that California:

- Encourage and expand dual enrollment between K-12 and the CCCs, so high school students can get a head start toward a college degree and get experience on a college campus.
- Delineate responsibilities and align policies, instructor credentialing, and data definitions between adult education and the community colleges. (California's adult education program is an essential part of the educational landscape for many underserved groups but it is barely addressed in the Master Plan and its governance is uneasily shared between CDE and the CCCCO.)
- More effectively align the credit and noncredit divisions of the CCCs.
- Develop modularized programs and stackable credentials so students can increase their skills and earnings capacity over time both within the CCCs and, ideally also between the CCCs and K-12 schools, adult education and CSUs.
- Embed existing industry and professional certifications in CTE programs to ensure greater portability.

E. Align goals and measures to achieve a shared vision of California's future and ensure accountability.

California's data and accountability systems lag much of the nation. As a state, we don't have a shared vision of what we want our workforce educational systems to achieve or a way of tracking their outcomes to improve accountability and inform policymaking. To address these problems, we must:

- Develop state outcome and equity goals for the workforce education system to achieve a shared vision of California's future and to ensure accountability.
- Align metrics and data systems across workforce education and training programs, including adult education, the community colleges, WIOA, and others.
- Improve access to outcomes data for policymakers and the public.