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Community Voices: A shared challenge, a shared goal, a shared promise

By Sonya Christian, Horace Mitchell, and Bryon Schaefer Dec 24, 2016



Sonya Christian

CASEY CHRISTIE / Californian file



Horace Mitchell

Felix Adamo / the californian//



Bryon Schaefer



CALIFORNIAN FILE

Bakersfield College and Cal State Bakersfield have worked closely with the Kern High School District to align the transition

Kern County's educational partners have never been more connected, more efficient, more effective, or more collaborative than now. Students have even greater access to college, and more students are college and career-ready as they leave the KHSD. College transfer rates from Bakersfield College to CSU Bakersfield have increased significantly, and collaboration with business and industry has strengthened and expanded to create a strong and educated workforce.

On Nov. 8, voters strongly reaffirmed their support for education by approving a series of bond requests from the elementary grade level and up. In a clear voice, voters committed to the support and facilities necessary to have an educated community and an educated workforce that can obtain better paying jobs and improve our collective economic growth and prosperity.

With that support, we who are responsible for education in this community have been deliberate in our work to create a college Guided Pathways System from 9th grade to college or the workforce. Our shared student success agenda through a variety of projects and initiatives leverages our strong partnerships to ensure that students complete degrees and certificates and enter the workforce with the skills they need to succeed.

On Dec. 21, we held an Education Roundtable to signal our community that we, KHSD, BC and CSUB, are working as an integrated education community, connected at multiple levels and through numerous focused projects to redesign, rethink and implement new strategies to improve the time necessary for completing a degree or certificate. Although we highlighted the work that we have done, our real focus was on the work yet to be done. Our local educational leaders committed publicly to collaboratively continue our work toward ensuring student success at each level.

Success builds on a strong foundation. Within KHSD the emphasis is on securing strong literacy and mathematical skills for students so that they graduate college- and career-ready. This includes completing college A-G entrance requirements, taking advanced dual enrollment courses to earn college credit before leaving high school, and verifying student success in all post-secondary work.

Bakersfield College and CSUB have worked closely with the KHSD to align the transition from high school to college in mathematics and English. High school seniors have the opportunity to take an Expository Reading and Writing course that helps students to be prepared for college-level English. Similar courses for math are also being developed. Through high school outreach, and using a variety of metrics to accurately gauge preparedness for college level English, BC has increased the percentage of students placing into college-level English by 20 percent. That work resulted in at least a \$1.4 million savings for BC students (and taxpayers) in the 2012-13 and 2014-15 school years.

High school outreach includes BC and CSUB staff working at local high schools to help students complete placement exams, orientation and finalize their academic plans for their first year of college. More than 1,500 local high school students are taking college credit classes through dual enrollment this semester with BC and CSUB, and next semester we expect that number to double. New students are also invited to BC's extended summer orientation where they learn how to be successful in college.

The Associate Degree for Transfer guarantees that students earn their degree in 60 applicable units and are eligible for transfer to any CSU with upper-division status, at which point, they'll only need to take another 60 units to earn a bachelor's. Over the past two years, BC's transfers to CSUs have increased 142 percent and the total number of area community college students enrolling at CSUB has nearly doubled in just the past three years.

We are seeing a positive change ripple through our institutions, and development of our college Guided Pathways System continues. Bakersfield College has taken the lead in bringing Guided Pathways to the California Community College system so that this effective framework can be adopted statewide.

The partnership between the Kern High School District, BC and CSUB has built trust among all levels — administration, faculty and staff. We are one educational community dedicated to securing the academic, career, and life success of our students. Together, we can create a flourishing future for our community by engaging our young people through intentional student support and guided pathways.

Together we can create a better Bakersfield, a better Kern County. And through education, anything is possible. This is our commitment and our promise to you!

Sonya Christian, Ph.D., is president of Bakersfield College; Horace Mitchell, Ph.D., is president of CSUB; and Bryon Schaefer, Ph.D., is superintendent of the KHSD.