

April 3, 2024

Dr. Dianne Van Hook, Chancellor  
College of the Canyons  
26455 Rockwell Canyon Road  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

Re: California Community Colleges Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI) Letter of Interest

Dear Dr. Dianne Van Hook:

**1. Institution name.**

San Mateo County Community College District

**2. Description of areas that your institution is doing well.**

**a. Introduction**

The San Mateo County Community College District (SMCCCD) was established in 1922, and operates three colleges: Cañada College, College of San Mateo and Skyline College. Located between San Francisco and Silicon Valley, the District colleges provide community college educational services to residents of the County of San Mateo, California. Combined, the District's three colleges serve nearly 30,000 students annually and offer the first two years of college-level instruction in a wide variety of transfer programs as well as career-technical programs. The District offers a robust services for Middle College High Schools at each campus, as well as dual enrollment and concurrent enrollment high school students.

Each of the District's colleges is fully accredited by the [Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges](#) (ACCJC), Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), an institutional accrediting body recognized by the [Council for Higher Education Accreditation](#) and the [U.S. Department of Education](#). The last accreditation occurred in 2019.

The District is governed by a six-member Board of Trustees, with five voting members elected by voters from designated areas of the County for four-year terms and one nonvoting student member elected by students for a one-year term. The day-to-day operations of the District are managed by the Board-appointed Chancellor, and the day-to-day operations of the three District colleges are managed by the Chancellor-appointed College Presidents.

**b. Hispanic Serving Institutions**

SMCCCD is renowned as one of the best two-year college districts in California. All three colleges are designated as Hispanic Serving Institutions and has a diverse student population that is a reflection of the communities that it serves.

SMCCCD is committed to achieving educational equity for all students. As outlined in the District's Strategic Plan, "success, equity, and social justice for our students are longstanding goals." We provide students with a rich and dynamic learning experience that embraces differences—emphasizing

collaboration and engaging students in and out of the classroom, encouraging them to realize their goals and become global citizens and socially responsible leaders.

**c. Free College**

Senate Bill B 893 was passed in 2022 and provides accessible higher education opportunities to students through fee waivers for students with the greatest financial need. It allows for the San Mateo County Community College District to operate a program that will pay the tuition and enrollment fees for students from underrepresented and marginalized communities.

SMCCCD's Board of Trustees invested \$6.75 million into developing their initial *Free Community College Initiative*, and an additional \$6 million was allocated in the District's 2022-23 budget to implement SB893, and now another \$10 million for the 2023-2024 budget. Through this investment, SMCCCD has been able to significantly increase enrollments, support the District's dual enrollment program with local high schools, offer textbook vouchers, and assist students with basic needs, including technology, food, and transportation.

The Free College program at SMCCCD removes the historical view of college being unattainable. The district is opening doors to opportunities for students to pursue their dreams without financial constraints.

**d. Impact of Free College: Enrollments Up 12%**

Enrollment at San Mateo County Community College District has returned to pre-pandemic levels after the district experienced a decline. The boost in enrollment is thanks to the Free College initiative of Senate Bill No. 893.

Thanks to SMCCCD's Free College program, coupled with a robust 10-month-long districtwide digital advertising campaign and the dedicated efforts of college staff and faculty, domestic student headcount was up 16% in Fall 2023 and 8% in Spring 2024, resulting in a total year-over-year academic year increase of 12%, or 2,533 students.

These results are even more impressive when compared to the most recent national and statewide community college enrollment reports for Fall 2023. Nationally, (according to the [National Student Clearinghouse Research Center](#)) fall enrollment at community colleges rose by 2.3% nationwide. The [State Chancellor's Office recently announced](#) that fall enrollments were up 8% statewide. Additionally, over 90 of the community colleges in the state saw a more modest 5-6% fall increase. Please read the Spring 2024 [SMCCCD Enrollment Report](#) shared at the February 28 Board Meeting for more details.

**3. Description of your institution's areas of focus for PRT or Mini-PRT assistance that will help advance your institutional effectiveness even more. Previous visits to institutions have addressed diverse topics such as enrollment management, student learning outcomes assessment, integrated planning, fiscal strategy, technology applications, and professional development.**

As Interim Chancellor, I have worked hard to improve efficiency in doing the business of the District. Now, the Board has adopted a new set of goals, and as we transition to a Permanent Chancellor, we need assistance in the development of a new strategic plan reflective of the Board's new goals, with measurable outcomes. The Board's newly adopted goals are:

- I. Ensure continuous improvement, radical transparency, and accountability in effecting the regular duties of the Board of Trustees.*
- II. Reinforce a thriving and positive-oriented workplace where employees feel supported in professional growth and innovation.*
- III. As stewards of the public trust, ensure prudent fiscal planning for the priorities of the District.*
- IV. Encourage and support innovations in outreach, recruitment, retention, and enrollment growth.*
- V. Empower students with pathways to completion that are innovative and responsive to their individual needs and industry demands.*
- VI. Inspire stronger educational and community partnerships that enable students to excel in their academic, career, and lifelong learning goals and contribute to the economic vitality in San Mateo County.*
- VII. Partner with the SMCCC Foundation to become a premier philanthropic organization that multiplies its reach and impact and catalyzes community support to optimize student access to programs and services.*
- VIII. As educational leaders, partner with stakeholders to emphasize the value of the community college experience, and the transformative impacts on students and the community.*

A detailed version of the Board goals is attached.

#### **4. Description of the rationale for these areas of focus.**

The District would like to hire a consultant with expertise in strategic planning and participatory governance to assist with the Strategic Plan development. We have a rare opportunity to invite District wide participation in the development of the new Strategic Plan, and at the same time, create opportunities for the permanent Chancellor to engage in meaningful dialogue with the community and constituent groups across all three campuses. In addition, the Board expressed a strong desire for a Strategic Plan to include clear and measurable outcomes to make it easy to gauge success of the District.

We believe the PRT team could assist us in achieving the outcomes to create a strategic plan for the District reflective of the Board goals and desires for measurable outcomes, and work with us to achieve deep engagement in the participatory governance process.

#### **5. Description of how these areas of focus relate to the Core Commitments in the Vision for Success and help advance Vision 2030.**

The California Community College Chancellor's Offices offers salient strategic directions and goals and outcomes for its Vision 2030 that align with our Board Goals and our focus on strategic in the following manner:

- a. Vision 2030 Strategic Direction: Equitable Baccalaureate Attainment
  - i. Aligns with Board Goal VI where the Board wishes to explore legislative opportunities for seamless articulation to four-year public universities; and to explore innovative four-year degree program development at each of the campuses.
- b. Vision 2030 Strategic Direction: Equitable Workforce and Economic Development
  - i. Aligns with Board Goal V where the board desires to support review of program viability and the development of innovative career education programs to meet industry needs.
- c. Vision 2030 Goal #1: Equity in Success
  - i. Aligns with Board Goal V with a desire to focus on monitoring and increasing completion outcomes for disproportionately impacted populations.

- d. Vision 2030 Outcome #1: Completion
  - i. Aligns with Board Goal V with the desire to sustain increased focus on part-time completion and focus on monitoring and increasing completion outcomes for disproportionately impacted populations.
- e. Vision 2030 Outcome #2: Baccalaureate Attainment
  - i. Aligns with Board Goal VI with a desire to explore legislative opportunities for seamless articulation to four-year public universities; and to explore innovative four-year degree program development at each of the campuses.
- f. Vision 2030 Outcome #3: Workforce Outcome
  - i. Aligns with Board Goal V to support review of program viability and the development of innovative career education programs to meet industry needs.
- g. Vision 2030 Outcome #4: Student Participation
  - i. Aligns with Board Goal IV with a desire to review and monitor reports on outreach, recruitment and enrollment strategies; and to review and monitor College and District data towards reasonable increases in enrollment.
- h. Vision 2030 Outcome #5: Maximizing Financial Aid
  - i. Aligns with Board Goal III to implement and grow its Free College program.
- i. Vision 2030 Outcome #6: Reduce Units to Completion
  - i. Aligns with Board Goal V with a desire to sustain increased focus on part-time completion.

**6. Indication of what would be the ideal time for the first visit.**

The ideal time for the PRT team's first visit would be Fall semester 2024.

**7. Signature of institution's CEO.**



Melissa Moreno, J.D.  
Interim Chancellor

CC:  
Vanessa Cordero, College of the Canyons  
Matthew C. Lee, Project Director, Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative