



Solano Community College Educational Master Plan

Community Forums Summary

Background

The Solano Community College District is developing an Educational Master Plan (EMP) to guide the development of district-wide programs as well as determine the programs and inform the facilities that will be developed at the new Vacaville and Vallejo Centers. The District has hired Moore Iacofano Goltsman, Inc. (MIG), a Berkeley-based planning firm, to help develop the EMP.

Purpose

Part of the Educational Master Plan process includes assessing the needs of the community. This involves gathering quantitative data and conducting community outreach. The quantitative data helps identify population, educational and workforce trends. The community outreach efforts identify how local residents perceive the college, the community's needs and desires and other relevant information. Supplemented by additional inputs, the quantitative data and the community outreach results will inform and guide the planning process. Serving the needs of the community is a high-priority for Solano Community College.

Approach

Community forums were held on July 11, 12, and 13, 2006 to invite business and political leaders, fellow educators and local residents to share their comments and feedback. Many prominent local politicians, business and community leaders attended each of the forums. The forums were scheduled in Fairfield, Vacaville and Vallejo to collect regionally specific as well as district-wide feedback. The regionally specific feedback will help inform the development of the new centers.

To increase participation, sessions in each of the locations were held from 7:30am to 9:30am and from 7:00pm to 9:00pm. The morning session was targeted to the business community and the evening session was targeted to the local community, though both sessions were open to all. Participants were provided with an informational folder that contained a Solano Community College District facts and figures sheet, a copy of the college's strategic plan and preliminary planning information for the Vacaville and Vallejo Centers.

During the forums, participants were asked to share key attributes, issues and opportunities for Solano. The discussions were facilitated and graphically recorded by MIG. Participants were also provided with comment cards where they could share additional information that was not captured during the session.

The following summary presents both the common themes that emerged across all six forums as well as the specific comments shared during each forum. The common themes are presented first and have been categorized by key attributes, key issues and opportunities. Following the common themes, the participant comments shared during each forum are provided. Together, the common themes and the site-specific information can provide both broad and targeted directions for the College and the centers.

Key Attributes

Each of the community forums began with an opportunity to share key attributes of the college. These attributes can provide a foundation on which to develop future courses, programs and services. Many of these attributes identified also highlight the positive response of the community to the college. Key attributes identified included:

- **Partnerships**—Community members shared the strength of the current partnerships the college has with local industries and educational providers. Industry partners assist with supporting and enhancing college courses and programs. Partnerships with schools provide important lines of communication with potential community college students. Outreach programs that are targeted towards middle and high school students can be instrumental in helping students identify educational and career opportunities and goals.
- **Job and Transfer Preparation**—Students are provided with opportunities at the college to prepare for transfer to a four-year college or to develop essential job skills, which may or may not result in a certificate. This range of educational paths supports the diverse educational and career goals of the community.
- **Access**—The college is open to a wide range of students and residents. Access is increased through specific programs including financial aid, basic skills development, English as a Second Language (ESL), and service location. Some participants at the forums also commented on the accessibility of the college’s facilities to the community.
- **Resource**—Participants identified the role of the college as a resource to the community and local industries. The community is served through the variety of courses and programs that are designed to meet diverse educational and career goals. The college is a resource to local industries through job training programs, contract education and the Small Business Development Center.
- **Diversity**—The students are diverse in ethnicity, age, background and abilities. This diversity helps support a comfortable learning environment, increases understanding and awareness and reflects the community. Current diversity levels among faculty could be increased.
- **Flexibility**—To meet the needs of students and the community, the college must remain flexible in the scheduling of courses and the use of space. The increase in online courses and programs has helped increase course flexibility and access by more students. Participants shared the need to continue to be flexible in the scheduling of classes as well as space. Flexibility within facilities will allow the college to respond to programmatic changes.
- **Programs**—There are a number of current programs that were recognized for their quality. Specific examples included the Physical Education and Sports, Theatre Arts, Nursing and the Debate Team.
- **Support Programs**—The ability of students to excel and reach their educational and career goals is supported through a variety of programs and services. Participants recognized the level of support offered by the college. Many of these support systems include programs and services that enhance student access as well.
- **Quality**—Many times during the forums participants remarked on the quality of faculty, staff, students and programs. Adjectives used by the community included “high-quality,” “great,” “strong,” “excellent,” “flexible” and “innovative.”

Key Issues

An important aspect to any plan is to respond to current issues and trends within the environment or the community. The community forums were created as a method to identify what the community perceives as key issues facing the college and the new centers. These issues will be incorporated into planning decisions. Key issues identified during the forums included:

- **Demographic Trends**—The population in the area will be shifting over time. In addition, urban growth patterns within the service area will potentially affect the college. Participants recognized the need for the college to monitor and respond to these shifts.
- **Economic and Workforce Needs**—As with the population, the economy will change over time. These economic shifts will in turn affect the training and educational needs of the local workforce. By working with industry and following economic and industry growth within the area, the college will be well positioned to serve the community in this capacity.

- **Access Issues**—The current accessibility of the college was noted when participants identified key attributes. As the local communities change over time, the college will need to continue to provide services and programs that increase access to education and training opportunities for all residents. Shifts within the local population as well as trends in secondary schools will increase the importance of meeting students’ financial and basic skill needs. In addition, transportation to the college and the new centers will need to be considered.
- **Communication**—The need to reach out to future students and their parents was cited many times during the community forums. These communication efforts are important for a number of reasons. Targeting secondary and middle students early in their education will open up the possibility of vocational, educational and career options. The importance of communicating with parents was also mentioned as a way to reach out to potential students and inform parents of opportunities available to their children through the college.
- **Facilities**—The design and development of facilities will support current, future and potential programs, student learning and provide opportunities to the community. Ensuring the facilities are flexible will also support the adaptability of the college to the changing educational and economic climate. In addition to renovating existing and developing new facilities, the college will need to plan for the continued maintenance and upkeep of these facilities.
- **Faculty and Staff**—The retention of and support for faculty and staff was cited as an important issue. Creating professional development and training programs was mentioned as potential ideas. Participants also suggested the need to increase diversity among faculty and staff. Additional comments specific to faculty included emphasizing credentials and increasing hiring in specific programmatic areas.

Opportunities

The funding from Measure G presents an exciting opportunity to improve existing facilities and develop the new Vacaville and Vallejo Centers. The development of the EMP to help support the bond funding will also increase the college’s abilities to further meet the needs of the local community, both residents and industry. To help the college identify potential opportunities, participants were asked to share future directions they envisioned for the college and the new centers. As with the issues listed above, the identified opportunities will inform the planning process and help guide decisions. Many of these opportunities build off of the college’s current attributes as well as current planning issues. Opportunities listed by the participants included:

- **Workforce and Economic Development**—The college has been successful in partnering with local industry to develop courses and programs that prepare students for employment. In addition, the Contract Education Program offers industry and local business the ability to have training tailored to their specific needs. Participants were very interested in the college identifying growth industries and developing or enhancing courses or programs that meet these new needs. It was also recognized that the growth in particular regional industries, such as biotechnology and health care, presented a wealth of opportunity for the college to provide workforce training for industries and career development for students. In addition, partnerships may potentially provide in-kind or financial support for course and program development as well as professional faculty.
- **Vocational Programs**—Linked to workforce and economic development, vocational programs were cited by participants as an important part of the college. Participants suggested expanding current vocational programs to offer additional opportunities to students and respond to industry and economic needs. The college will also need to communicate career opportunities provided through the programs to current and potential students. This may include overcoming some current perceptions about vocational careers. Many current vocations are moving towards an increased reliance on technology and the college can provide training to support this transition.
- **School Partnerships**—Participants noted the importance of creating links with elementary, middle and high school students and parents. Creating these links through formal programs or communication was recognized as an important way to develop and prepare future students as well as introduce potential educational and career options. Concurrent enrollment, bringing students to campus and building on

existing programs were mentioned as specific methods that could introduce students to the college and enhance their educational experience. Continued partnerships with local high schools will be important due to the current and potential affects of the California Exit Exam. Not only could the college help prepare students for the exam, but it could also provide educational and career opportunities for students who do not pass the exam. Participants often suggested connecting with the parents of local students to highlight the accessibility of the college and instill the value of an education on their child's future.

- **Training and Retraining Adult Learners**—As the workforce ages, adults of all ages are revitalizing and reinventing their careers. In responses to shifts in the economy, adult incumbent workers may need to enhance their current skill sets or develop new skills to remain competitive. Workers may also embark on new career paths, again potentially requiring upgraded or new skills. Participants recognized the need to develop programs, including workforce development, and courses that meet the needs of traditional and adult students. In addition, programs, courses and schedules may need to be designed that focus specifically on the unique needs of this target population, such as intensive computer skills development courses.
- **Student Supports and Services**—Once students enroll in the college, it will be imperative that they are supported to meet their educational and career goals. Participants recognized the success of current programs and encouraged the college to continue expanding these services. Student support can also be enhanced through the developed of space and classrooms that facilitate learning and encourage community building as well as the expansion of online courses and programs. In response to shifts in demographics, the college may also want to consider expanding the current ESL program and providing information in multiple languages. Meeting the needs of the increasingly diverse student population will also require the development of innovative teaching methods that support the learning styles of all students.
- **Communication and Outreach**—In addition to communicating with children and youth in schools, the college could increase its current outreach to the community. This may help reach additional audiences and will build additional awareness of college and the new centers.
- **Community Needs**—The college serves a variety of students with a wide range of educational, career and life goals. Participants were interested in the college meeting the needs of the whole community through courses and programs that were targeted to specific groups. In particular, the importance of meeting the needs of lifelong learners, including “baby boomers” and retirees, was mentioned. Beyond courses and programs, participants were also interested in increased access to the college by the community, including access to college facilities.
- **Transfer Preparation**—Many of the students at the college are preparing to transfer to a four-year college. Participants were interested in additional enhancements to support transfer students. Ideas included partnerships with near-by colleges and extension programs located in the service area as well as additional articulation agreements. Transfer preparation could be enhanced through developing career paths for students to guide them in their studies now and in the future.
- **Faculty and Staff**—The need to retain and support a diverse pool of faculty and staff was recognized during the forums. Participants suggested professional development and training opportunities as potential support methods. In addition to meeting the needs of the college faculty, participants mentioned the possibility of supporting teachers within the service area to develop potential college faculty, retain teachers at the elementary, middle and high school levels and support continued education.
- **Funding and Shared Resources**—Participants commented on the need to continue to explore and secure stable funding for the college. Some of the current and potential programs, particularly specific vocational programs, may require expensive equipment and continued upgrades. As mentioned above, funding and in-kind donations could potentially come from industry partners. In addition, the college should explore additional grant opportunities and enhance funding raising strategies. It was also mentioned that the college would need to consider how to sustain the facilities developed with the Measure G funding.

Economic Clusters and Educational Program Opportunities

As mentioned above, participants at all the community forums recognized the potential for the College to meet the needs of current and emerging economic clusters. The desire to meet these needs may influence the enhancement or development of educational programs at the College and the centers.

Economic Clusters

During the course of the forums, participants identified the following specific economic clusters:

- Healthcare
- Biotechnology
- Public Safety/Security
- Fire Science
- Leadership/Management
- Nursing/ Allied Health
- Agriculture
- Tourism and Hospitality
- Manufacturing, including High-tech Manufacturing
- Logistics
- Engineering
- Planning
- Construction
- Automotive Technology
- Food and Beverage
- Nutraceuticals
- Emergency Preparedness
- Culinary Arts
- “Green” Industry
- Insurance Industry
- Machinery

Educational Program Opportunities

Participants shared a number of potential educational program opportunities that would essentially help connect students and industry through education, training and workforce development. Some of these potential opportunities could build on or be modeled after current programs at the College. The examples provided below expand on the information listed in the previous sections.

- Develop workforce partnerships with specific businesses and industries. This could include training and educating new employees as well as providing opportunities for retraining and skill development. Programs should meet the needs of all students, including older adults. Industry participation in developing courses and certificates will be key.
- Diversify vocational programs to potentially include horticulture, court reporting, motorcycle mechanics, plumbing, solar power and carpentry. Enhance current automotive technology, electrician and medical assisting programs.
- Support transfer students through agreements and partnerships with four-year colleges and universities.
- Partner with K-12 schools to prepare students to enter vocational, workforce and degree programs. This could include preparation courses at the high school level and the design of specific “career ladders.” Linking students with educational and career goals early on can support their continued success.
- Expand current nursing/healthcare programs through partnerships with local industry, such as Kaiser. Programming should include preparation for incoming students as well as current industry employees who are seeking additional training.
- Respond to the change in demographics by expanding the Early Childhood Education program. In addition, the College could consider programs targeted at supporting teachers and professionals in the K-12 system. This would help retain quality teachers in the public schools.
- Continue to build the Contract Education program with the potential to offer online and onsite courses.
- Identify funding sources, such as grants, that would help develop specific vocational and workforce programs.
- Recognize the needs of the growing ESL community and develop programs that help them develop needed skills. This could include offering non-credit programs.