



DOING WHAT MATTERS FOR JOBS AND THE ECONOMY

Division of Workforce and Economic Development

I would like to share coverage of the first meeting of the **Board of Governors Task Force on Workforce, Job Creation and a Strong Economy** written by the **California Economic Summit** on its **CAECONOMY Reporting blog**.

Coming up next:

- Attend your **Regional College Conversation and/or Regional Faculty Conversations**.
- Invite external stakeholders who depend on the community colleges for workforce training to a **Strong Workforce Town Hall meetings**.
- Stay updated on Task Force roll out by subscribing to our **eUpdates/eAlerts**.

Regards,

Van Ton-Quinlivan, Vice Chancellor

Workforce & Economic Development Division

Chancellor's Office, California Community Colleges



The Task Force on Workforce meets in Sacramento last week.
(Photo Credit: John Guenther)

Task Force to close California's skills gap kicks off their mission

January 26, 2015 by John Guenther

When asked if there's a skills gap in California's workforce, nearly every hand in the room was raised. The setting was only the very first meeting of a **task force created** to make sure California workers will actually be trained for jobs available now and in the future. But, there was already a sense of urgency in the room that the future is now and not closing the skills gap will just keep the state's inequality gap wide open.

"If we don't, the students that we teach, the people that we



About the Task Force

[Overview](#)

[Task Force Members](#)

[Board of Governors Members](#)

[Burning Questions - FAQs](#)

Calendar

[Regional College & Faculty Conversations](#)

[Strong Workforce Town Hall Meetings](#)

[Task Force Meetings](#)

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serve, the folks who are trying to get good jobs, won't have pathways to the good jobs now and over the next 10 years," said Tim Rainey, executive director of the California Workforce Investment Board and member of the task force. "If we don't build those bridges, we can't impact poverty, deal with underemployment, we can't provide the kind of economic opportunity that we want to provide. So it's a skills agenda and it's an economic development agenda, all in one. It's a jobs agenda."

The team of Californians appointed to what is formally called the **Task Force on Workforce, Job Creation and a Strong Economy**, which was commissioned by the California Community Colleges **Board of Governors**, kicked off their work last week in Sacramento.

Skills Gap Exists

The task force, **announced at the end of last year**, was also partly born from the California Economic Summit repeatedly identifying workforce and skills issues as big problems in all regions of the state. And there was no shortage of factoids to show the existence of the skills gap.

"So very simply said, 11 million Americans unemployed, 4 million jobs sit unfilled, demonstrating the gulf between the skills that jobseekers currently have and the skills employers need," said Eva Sage-Gavin, executive vice president of Gap Inc. and co-lead of the **Aspen Institute's Skills for America's Future** advisory board, which has studied labor market needs nationwide. "If you have any question of the depth of the skills gap, literally I sat with chief major officers...who are spending \$20,000 a person to get someone through a welding certification."

To drive the point home on the urgency of the task force's charge, researchers showed the group more data on how California has a worse skills gap problem than the rest of the country, despite having half a million middle-skill job openings last year in areas like manufacturing, IT, health care, purchasing and HR.

"These jobs turn out to be--even though they turn out to be vital to American competitiveness-- they take a long time to fill and that's a good indicator that there's a gap," said Matthew Sigelman, CEO of Burning Glass, a labor market analytics firm. "They take 20 percent longer to fill in California than they take elsewhere in the nation."

While California's high-tech sector is booming, Sigelman and others said schools could have good bang for their buck in combating the erosion of the middle class with programs to train for those middle-skill jobs that don't require four-year degrees but some post-secondary education.

"What we really want to do, between 2015 and 2025, is close the gap on credentials and degrees and higher education exposure for the citizens of California that we've been told repeatedly by every think tank in the country

exists. And that's why you're here." said Brice Harris, Chancellor of the California Community Colleges.

Community Colleges Ideal for the Process

The focus of the task force's energy will be wielding the strengths of the 112-school California Community College system, which has schools that cover the state and have strong potential for implementing change on a regional, collaborative level.

"Clearly the colleges are on the forefront of helping California policymakers understand that in addition to state and county and city and special district governance, we have regional governance in California," said task force member and CA Fwd President and CEO Jim Mayer who noted he himself was a "product of the community colleges."

Recently, the community colleges--and workforce training in general--have been spotlighted by the **\$1.2 billion in workforce training funds included** in Governor Jerry Brown's proposed budget and by President Obama calling for free tuition for two years of community college.

While funding that White House proposal will probably be a bit of a hurdle, Task Force members made it clear more people are rethinking the community college system as an essential workforce tool for getting a diverse group of Californians into the middle class, instead of just transferring students out to other schools.

"Community colleges are the vehicle for the residents of California who are disenfranchised to have the skills to have employable, family-supporting jobs," said Bill Scroggins, president and CEO of Mt. San Antonio College. "It's really essential for California to do that because we invest so much in the social support network that is very costly and doesn't allow people to have the dignity of work."

What's Next

The Task Force's ultimate job will be approving a list of recommendations in a tight timeframe of eight months by looking through a range of options. Suggested through eight regional listening sessions the Chancellor's office conducted, those options included:

- creating more industry-valued credentials
- increasing STEM skills that matter to employers and career pathways for jobs in the regions
- encouraging more employer co-investment through programs like apprenticeships.

All of the suggestions will require some industry input to make sure curriculum, which can take considerable time to be altered, aligns with the rapidly changing needs of an industry, like say manufacturing.

"We describe ourselves as the industry that can answer California's middle class crisis," said Nicole Rice, policy

director at the California Manufacturing & Technology Association and also a task force member. "We provide those jobs that have way-above average wages that have benefits, retirement security, and opportunity to mobility. We can provide those jobs but manufacturing is changing. We deal with globalization on an everyday basis and we have to remain competitive not only domestically but also globally."

The meeting closed out with members telling the team what success would look like from their perspective interest.

"The way funding works for community colleges is one-size-fits-all," said Kuldeep Kaur, chief business officer at Yuba Comm College District. "And with [career technical education] there's very special needs, special talents, professional development needs for faculty, facilities that we need to have funding that goes along with meeting the needs of the state. It's definitely a great investment to make as we all acknowledge, based on this gap in skills. To me, that's what I see success looks like, is having the resources shifted from unemployment or other resources into something worthy to invest in and enhance the economy of the state."

The task force will come together again in April to refine the list of recommendations. Before that meeting, there also will be [five town halls held across the state](#) in the coming weeks to discuss how to better connect the colleges with key industry sectors in those regions.

"Through this process, I see hope for changing the perspective of my membership when it comes to working collaboratively, innovatively into the future with the community colleges to get the workforce that they need to have," said Cathy Martin, vice president, workforce at the California Hospital Association.

You can check out the [calendar of events for the Task Force here](#) and read more about the process on the Colleges' [Doing What Matters for Jobs and the Economy site](#). The conversation continues on Twitter with the hashtag [#StrongWorkforce](#).



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