

Assembly Higher Education Committee

November 6, 2023: Oversight Hearing Speaker Biographies

1) Panel 1 – Landscape of Dual Enrollment in California.

- a) Michal Kurlaender, Ed.D. (she/her) - Professor Kurlaender is a faculty co-director of Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), the California Education Lab, and lead researcher of Wheelhouse: The Center for Community College Leadership and Research. She serves on the executive committee of the Center for Poverty and Inequality at UC Davis, is an affiliated scholar with the Student Experience Research Network (formerly the Mindset Scholars Network), and a Strategic Advisor to The Education Trust-West.

Michal Kurlaender research resides in students' educational pathways, particularly K-12 and postsecondary alignment, and access to and success in higher education. She has expertise on alternative pathways to college and college readiness at both community colleges and four-year colleges and universities. In addition to working with national data, Kurlaender works closely with administrative data from all three of California's public higher education sectors—the University of California, the California State University, and the California Community College systems.

- b) Olga Rodriguez, Ph.D. (she/her) - Olga Rodriguez is director of the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) Higher Education Center, as well as, a senior fellow at the PPIC, where she holds the Thomas and Marilyn Sutton Chair in Higher Education Policy. As center director, she works with a team of researchers to identify programs and policies to help make the state's higher education system more successful, equitable, and sustainable. Her own research focuses on college access and success among underserved students. Her recent work has examined statewide reforms to developmental education, English as a second language, dual enrollment, and assessment and placement systems in California's community colleges. Before joining PPIC, she was a postdoctoral research associate at the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University. She holds a BA in economics/mathematics and Spanish from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and an MA and PhD in economics and education from Columbia University.

2) Panel 2 – California College and Career Access Pathways.

- a) Gregory C. Soto (he/him) – Dean of Dual Enrolment, Outreach, Guided Pathways, and A&R, Merced College.
- b) Dr. Mark Sanchez, Ed.D. (he/him) – Dr. Sanchez is currently the Superintendent and President of Southwestern Community College District. Dr. Mark Sanchez’ experience includes over twenty years in community college leadership, teaching and instruction, and workforce development. His passion for social justice has been demonstrated throughout his career. In his career in California community college leadership, he has been successful in the development and implementation of comprehensive race-conscious-equity-focused instruction, student services, and online programs designed to increase student access and success, student outreach, and student personal development.

Prior to beginning his Presidency at Southwestern College, Dr. Sanchez was the Assistant Superintendent/Vice-President of Student Success and Support Programs at Cuesta College, also served as the Dean of Student Affairs, Counseling at Hartnell College; Dean of Student Services, Counseling at Fresno City College; and Director of Student Support Programs at San Jose Evergreen Valley College. He also teaches university graduate courses online (asynchronous) in the Master of Education Program at Brandman University.

- c) Dr. Naomi Castro, Ed.D (she/her) – Dr. Castro leads Career Ladder Project (CLP)on its work on dual enrollment statewide. Her approach is informed by deep experience in both teaching and administration at community colleges and at middle and high schools. Dr. Castro was named a California Education Policy Fellow for 2019-2020, and she is widely recognized for her expertise on community college reform in California. She has led CLP projects funded by the California Career Pathways Trust and the Strong Workforce Program and projects to build capacity for Guided Pathways implementation. She also offers legislative briefing and

co-authored the Dual Enrollment Toolkit and “Creating a Dual Enrollment Partnership,” which are used by practitioners across California.

Dr. Castro holds a doctorate in educational leadership, administration, and policy from Pepperdine University and a master’s degree in teaching and teacher education and a bachelor’s degree in history from the University of Arizona.

- d) Linda Collins (she/her) – Professor Collins is the founder and executive director of Career Ladders Project (CLP) and focuses on institutional reforms that can improve college and career outcomes for low-resourced students and students of color, and hopes to eliminate opportunity gaps and disrupt inequities in higher education. She has extensive experience with educational policy, frequently advising state and national policymakers.

Professor Collins currently works with the California Community College Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) and colleges across the state to launch the 9th Grade to Baccalaureate strategy in support of the CCC Board of Governors’ Vision 2030. She and her team also work closely with the California Department of Education (CDE) to provide capacity-building support to state-funded dual enrollment partnerships.

3) Panel 3 – Vision for the Future of Dual Enrollment.

- a) Dr. Sonya Christian (she/her) – In 2023, Dr. Sonya Christian was appointed by the Board of Governors to serve as the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges. Before her appointment, Dr. Christian served as the sixth Chancellor of the Kern Community College District (Kern district). Dr. Christian began her three-decade career locally within Kern district as a mathematics faculty, a Division Chair, and Dean of Science, Engineering, Allied Health, and Math at Bakersfield College. From 2013 to 2021 she served as the 10th President of Bakersfield College – one of the colleges overseen by Kern district.

Throughout her career, Dr. Christian has been committed to advancing work through distributed leadership and collaborative communities of

learning, and to promoting the value of equity in student learning, access, success and economic mobility.

- b) Pete Callas (he/him) – Pete Callas is the Director of the Career and College Transition Division at the California Department of Education. The division provides administrative services, resources, and policy support to local educational agencies to improve performance in secondary education, including middle and high schools, adult education, career technical education, workforce development, and distance learning programs.

