

THE CONSORTIUM CONNECTION



Strengthening Our Workforce, Empowering Our Communities

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Photo Credit: SDI RC

As we wrap up another impactful semester, I want to take a moment to reflect on the progress we've made together. This season has been filled with meaningful collaboration, innovative initiatives and a shared commitment to supporting our students, employers and communities. From new partnerships and programs to continued strides in equity, access and student success, your dedication has shaped every accomplishment highlighted in this newsletter.

Thank you for the energy, creativity and resilience you bring to this work. I hope you enjoy this snapshot of what we've achieved — and what we're building toward — as we look ahead to a new year of opportunity.

Danene Brown, Ph.D.
Regional Consortium Chair

News Center



Photo Courtesy of SDI RC

Engaging Employers to Align Curriculum to Industry with Program Advisories

Strong partnerships between education and industry are the backbone of successful Career Technical Education programs. That's why the San Diego & Imperial Counties Regional Consortium's (SDI RC) Employer Engagement team has made industry recruitment a top priority for its program advisories, where colleges and employers work together to ensure programs truly prepare students for today's workforce needs. Faculty at community colleges across the region say these efforts have improved program quality, strengthened industry partnerships and created new opportunities for students to gain relevant skills and meaningful career pathways. Over the past three years, SDI RC has brought more than 480 industry representatives to these convenings.

[Read more about their successes here.](#)



Photo Courtesy of SDI RC

Celebrating Collaboration: Region Hosts First Apprenticeship Mixer

SDI RC hosted its first-ever apprenticeship mixer on Sept. 24, uniting more than 50 apprenticeship leaders, educators and workforce partners from across Southern California. Held in partnership with the James Irvine Foundation, Southern California Apprenticeship Network, UNITE-LA and San Diego Workforce Partnership, the event celebrated regional progress in building a robust apprenticeship ecosystem and highlighted the power of collaboration in expanding apprenticeship opportunities across key sectors like healthcare, behavioral health and advanced manufacturing. The evening underscored a shared commitment to aligning education, workforce and industry to create equitable, high-quality career pathways for local learners.

[Read more about the mixer here.](#)



The Power of Advanced Manufacturing Education

October's Manufacturing Month showcased how regional colleges and industry partners are preparing students for high-demand careers in advanced manufacturing and skilled trades. Student tours, facilitated by SDI RC, included SeeScan, Solar Turbines, Earthrise Nutritionals, USG Plaster City and Hunter Industries, allowing students to see modern manufacturing in action. Students at MiraCosta, Palomar, Cuyamaca, San Diego Mesa, San Diego City (SDCC) and Imperial Valley colleges engaged in hands-on learning, including Water Career Day with the San Elijo Joint Powers Authority. The month also marked the launch of a new industrial maintenance technician apprenticeship with GKN Aerospace and SDCC, demonstrating the strong partnerships fueling regional workforce development.

[Read more about these events here.](#)

Insights & Innovations



Dr. Pamela Luster, President of Grossmont College, welcoming participants to Grossmont's Career Education Community Forum.

Photo Courtesy of SDI RC

Community Forums Gather Local Insight to Strengthen Education and Workforce Alignment

The San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) recently wrapped up a seven-part series of Career Education Community Forums, funded by SDI RC, bringing together nearly 300 educators, employers and community partners to discuss workforce trends, student needs and equitable access to education. Each forum centered on the COE's Community College District Profiles, which offer ZIP-code-level data on demographics, labor market trends and concentrations of priority populations — key tools for educators, policymakers and community organizations engaged in grant writing and program planning.

The sessions also ensure that community voices shape the Comprehensive Regional Needs Assessment, a report that the COE develops to help colleges meet Perkins V requirements. By combining quantitative data with community-driven insights, the COE's regional forums allowed participants to interpret and discuss the results while keeping the voices of employers, educators and residents central to shaping the future of career education across San Diego and Imperial Counties.

"We had incredible support across the region from college presidents," said Dr. Tina Ngo Bartel, Executive Director of the COE. "Each district played a role in our success by

inviting participants and hosting the events. This level of collaboration is what makes the San Diego and Imperial region special, and we are so grateful for their engagement and partnership."

[Read more about the sessions here.](#)

New Report Highlights Strategies to Support Adult Learners

With funding support provided by SDI RC, the COE's newest study sheds light on the experiences of adult learners, who are defined as students aged 25 and older who balance college with work, family and other responsibilities. Representing nearly half of all students across the region's community colleges, their success is vital to reaching California's goal of 70% postsecondary attainment by 2030.

To help community colleges strengthen strategies and policies that support adult learners, the COE surveyed more than 600 adult learners who attended one or more community colleges in the region.

The report shares adult learners' experiences both inside and outside the classroom and offers actionable recommendations to better support their success, including flexible course options, simplified re-enrollment and stronger pathways to high-demand, high-wage careers.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Student Success Spotlight



Photo Courtesy of Katya Korkees

Career-Ready and Confident: Grossmont-Cuyamaca Alum Katya Korkees' Path to San Diego State University

Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District alum Katya Korkees began college unsure of her career path but found her footing through the guidance and opportunities offered by the SDI RC and her college's Job Placement Case Manager, Malena Medrano. With their support, she gained hands-on experience through multiple internships — from marketing at East County Schools Federal Credit Union to people operations at the Downtown San Diego Partnership — helping her build confidence in her future. Now

majoring in human resources at San Diego State University, Katya is sharing her journey with other students, encouraging them to network, stay proactive and embrace every opportunity.

[Read more of Katya's story here.](#)

Committee Corner



Regional Oversight Committee

The Regional Oversight Committee (ROC) serves as the regionally representative governance body designated by SDICCCA's CEOs to oversee Strong Workforce Program (SWP) implementation, ensuring alignment with regional goals and strategic priorities. Meeting five times per year, the ROC is led by MiraCosta College Superintendent/President Dr. Sunny Cooke and San Diego Miramar College President Dr. Wes Lundburg, and is composed of instructional, student services, administrative, career education, faculty, district, and regional leaders from all ten colleges.

Its membership includes CSSOs Shakerra Carter (SD College of Continuing Education) and Marciano Perez, Jr. (SD City College); CIOs Tina Recalde (Palomar College) and Silvia Cornejo (Southwestern College); CBOs Lorenze Legaspi (SD Mesa College) and Erica Balakian (Cuyamaca College); District Instruction representatives Barbara Gallego (GCCCD) and Susan Topham (SDCCD); CE Deans Jennifer Lewis (Southwestern College) and Al Taccone (MiraCosta College); POST Director Brett Houser (Imperial Valley College); COE Director Tina Ngo-Bartel; faculty representatives Christina Sharp (Business, MiraCosta College), Sharon Sampson (AOJ, Grossmont College), Michael Speyrer (AOJ, Southwestern College), Nikko De Lao (SD City College), Tanya Hertz (SD Miramar College), Sarah DeSimone (Emergency Medical Education, Palomar College), and Will Olmstead (Business/IT, SD College of Continuing Education); along with Regional Chair Danene Brown and Strong Workforce Fiscal Agent Sally Cox.

Together, the ROC provides essential oversight, funding approvals, and guidance to support effective SWP implementation across the region. We extend our sincere appreciation to all ROC members for their service, leadership, and continued commitment to supporting regional student success and workforce development.

In the News

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Dr. Tina Ngo Bartel giving the keynote at Counselor Institute held at San Diego Miramar College. Photo Courtesy of SDI RC

New Counselor Institute Strengthens Link Between Data and Student Success

On Oct. 17, SDI RC kicked off the next phase of the Strong Workforce Counselor Institute at San Diego Miramar College, where President Dr. Wesley Lundburg welcomed counseling faculty from across the region. Funded by the Strong Workforce Program, with research and technical support from the COE, the yearlong professional development initiative strengthens counselors' use of data, labor market information and culturally inclusive practices in guiding students toward meaningful career pathways. The experience helps counselors connect education to employment through collaboration with Career Technical Education and institutional research departments at each college.

Dr. Tina Ngo Bartel, the COE's Executive Director, delivered the keynote presentation, sharing findings from the [Student Support Services Study](#), which found that students who used counseling and career services were 20% more likely to find jobs related to their field.

In the months ahead, counselors will collaborate on campus-based action plans that strengthen student success and advance equity-minded, data-informed practices across the region.

[Read more about their efforts here.](#)



Molly Ash, Benjamin Gamboa & Taylor Toledo presenting at the CCCAOE Conference. Photo Courtesy of SDI RC

MiraCosta College Highlights Apprenticeship Innovation Through Strategic Communication

MiraCosta College is redefining how colleges engage communities around apprenticeship opportunities. After securing three California Apprenticeship Initiative grants, MiraCosta recognized that to successfully launch programs, they would have to hear from students, faculty and employers. Through in-depth research and message testing, MiraCosta identified common misconceptions about apprenticeships and developed tailored communication strategies to close the "message gap."

The findings were shared by Benjamin Gamboa and Molly Ash of MiraCosta, and Taylor Toledo of Toledo Consulting, in their presentation [Minding the Message Gap: What People Really Think of Apprenticeships](#) at both the California Community College Association for Occupational Education and Advancing California Apprenticeship conferences. Their work underscores that expanding apprenticeship opportunities depends not only on program development but on authentic, audience-informed communication that connects employers, students and educators around shared goals for workforce readiness.

[Read more about MiraCosta's findings here.](#)



Photo Courtesy of SDI RC

SDI RC and San Diego Regional EDC Present San Diego's Approach to Bridging the Talent Gap on National Stage

The SDI RC and San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation (EDC) recently shared San Diego's collaborative approach to workforce alignment on the national stage at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) National Learning Network Fall Summit in Washington, D.C. During their mainstage session, *Activating Workforce and Education with TPM*, Taylor Dunne, EDC Director of Talent Initiatives, and Kevin McMackin, SDI RC Director of Strategic Partnerships, highlighted how the Advancing San Diego (ASD) initiative has redefined regional workforce development. By leveraging the TPM framework and strong employer partnerships, ASD connects verified education and training programs directly to industry needs, ensuring that local students gain the skills employers value most. The presentation drew national attention to San Diego's inclusive, data-driven model for building a future-ready workforce.

[Read more about the summit here.](#)



California
Community
Colleges

Vision 2030 Regional Convening - Dec 4th & 5th

California Community College Chancellor, Sonya Christian, will host a two-day Regional Convening for the San Diego & Imperial Counties region, bringing together colleges, districts, and partners to engage in collaborative discussions on how institutions are advancing the goals of Vision 2030. Day One will feature a consistent statewide agenda, with presentations from Chancellor's Office leaders including Vice Chancellors James Todd and Siria Martinez, Senior Advisor Don Daves-Rougeaux, and Assistant Vice Chancellor Terrence Willett, who will support Institutional Research teams in preparing for the new data tools.

Day Two presentations will highlight regional programs and initiatives aligned with Vision 2030 and showcase two panels. The first panel will feature Stewart Knox, Secretary of the Labor & Workforce Development Agency, and Tony Cordova, Vice Chancellor of the Workforce and Economic Development Division. The second panel, moderated by Dr. Sunny Cooke, will include regional workforce and economic development leaders Mark Cafferty (San Diego Regional EDC), Rachel Bereza (San Diego Workforce Partnership), Tim Kelley (Imperial Valley EDC), and Priscilla Lopez (Imperial County Workforce & Economic Development). The convening will be held at the Omni San Diego Hotel.

For registration information, please contact the [Regional Consortium](#).



Photo Courtesy of SDCCD

SDCCD Hosts Inaugural Work-Based Learning Summit at Miramar College

The San Diego Community College District (SDCCD) hosted its first Work-Based Learning (WBL) Summit on Oct. 31 at Miramar College, drawing a standing-room-only crowd of 172 faculty, staff, employers and workforce partners. The program featured a keynote from Chancellor Gregory Smith, who highlighted how WBL builds social capital, real-world skills, and pathways to living-wage careers, followed by inspiring student and employer panels and seven presentations showcasing WBL in action across the district.

"Work-Based Learning is one of the most successful tools we have in connecting students not just with academic success but with professional success through living wage employment," Smith said.

The summit also reflects the region's growing momentum, bolstered by SDI RC's employer engagement team, which helps connect colleges with industry to expand high-quality internships, apprenticeships, service-learning experiences, and other WBL opportunities that prepare students for meaningful careers.

[Watch the full recap video here.](#)



Photo Courtesy of the
East County Economic Development Council

East County Manufacturing Expo featured in East County Community Times

The East County Economic Development Council hosted the 10th annual East County Manufacturing Expo at Cuyamaca College on Sept. 30, highlighting innovation and career pathways in the region's manufacturing sector. The event welcomed more than a thousand high school and college students and job seekers, along with leading manufacturers, such as Solar Turbines, Thermo Fisher Scientific, Lincoln Electric and General Atomics.

Attendees explored hands-on exhibits, educational programs and workforce resources, supported by sponsors including SDG&E and the San Diego Water Authority. Local and state representatives also attended the event, reaffirming the industry's importance to regional economic growth.

[Read the East County Community Times' story here \(page 2\).](#)

Announcements

2026 Regional Professional Dates & Registration

WORK-BASED LEARNING PROFESSIONAL COURSE: Faculty

WORK-BASED LEARNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSE:
Counselors & Student Support Professionals

CE TEACH: Career Education New Teacher Course

Happenings in 2025 - 26

November

21

Workforce Development Council Meeting - COE, Adult Learner Study: Insights to Strengthen Practices and Policies
10:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
zoom
[Register here](#)

December

11

MPACE Conference
Las Vegas, NV
Kevin McMackin (SDI RC) and Taylor Dunne (San Diego Regional EDC) will present on Advancing San Diego: Aligning Industry and Education using the TPM model.

February

11

K-16 Collaborative Health Career Pathways Learning Summit
9:15 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Sharp Prebys Innovation and Education Center
8695 Spectrum Center Blvd, San Diego, CA 92123
[More Information Here](#)



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