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Report of the Joint Committee on the Master Plan for Higher Education

APPRECIATING OUR PAST, ENSURING OUR FUTURE

A Public Agenda of Needs for Higher Education in California

Our review marks the 50th Anniversary of California's Master Plan for Higher Education. We convened in large measure because of the widespread concern that our system of public higher education is now at risk.

The Master Plan was - and remains - a comprehensive policy framework. Upon its advent and in the decades following, it signaled an unparalleled commitment to Higher Education, of unrivaled size and scale. Through planned and coordinated growth, it mandated universal opportunity and universal access – pioneering principles.

In our estimation, nothing has been more responsible over the past several decades for the quality of life in California and for California's economic prosperity than our system of higher education.

During our comprehensive hearings, there have been no experts to argue that California's economy and social fabric can now benefit from a contraction of either educational opportunities or educated people. Indeed, our systematic review of higher education, with broad public and stakeholder testimony, confirms that California's future depends on an even more effectively educated people. Private investment and growth are dependent upon an ever expanding number of women and men ably prepared to contribute and compete in the global market place, adding value through their superior knowledge, imagination and skill.

In light of this challenge, this Committee now reaffirms the essential tenets of the California Master Plan for Higher Education: universal access, affordability and high quality.

However, we also believe that the Master Plan must be regarded as a living document. In many ways, California has transformed since the inception of the Master Plan. Therefore, in order for our state and people to meet the challenges of the twenty first century, we will need the vision and courage to ensure our system of higher education adapts when and as necessary to meet the needs of the society that sustains it and the demands of the new century.

Our hearings have demonstrated that, after five decades of success, our system of higher education is now threatened. The system will not continue to be effective automatically. It requires our renewed attention, commitment and support.

After objective and close scrutiny, we conclude that the following findings portray an agenda of needs accurately describing what our people and state require from our system of higher education to ensure California's success in the coming decades:

I. An Overarching Policy Framework:

- **Our need for a system to develop and provide clear, concise statewide goals or outcomes for California higher education attuned to the public interest of the people and State of California:**

The State of California has no articulated, comprehensive statement of goals for California's system of higher education. The Master Plan articulates values but not a set of public policy goals based upon the *outcomes* required to meet the needs of our state and our people. The lack of such goals makes it difficult to develop sound systems of criteria for advancement or clear systems of accountability.

Statewide goals, including the workforce needs of the state, are essential for the effective functioning of our system of public higher education, complemented by the work of institutions comprising the fourth segment, private colleges and universities.

II. Universal Access:

- **Our need for higher education that is accessible to all eligible California students:**

In order for California to compete in the global marketplace, replace the baby boomer generation and ensure a cohesive and democratic multicultural society, our State must continue to support the unique genius of California's original 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education, namely its commitment to universal access for every qualified student. This access provided our State and people the distinction that enabled us to become the world leader in higher education.

Given the economic needs of our state and the labor-market needs of our economy, open access gives us the greatest possibility of meeting those long-term needs. In addition, in a state as diverse as California, the maintenance of this promise gives hope to all Californians who wish to attain a higher education. This hope is essential to our success and cohesion as a people.

III. Affordability and Financial Aid:

- **Our need for higher education that is affordable to our California students:**

Affordability must be established within a clearly articulated and agreed upon framework of shared cost, between the student who benefits directly from a quality education and the public, for whom the student's education is an investment for the public good. As a practical matter in the real world, the absence of affordability makes the achievement of universal access an impossible dream.

We must recognize the limited financial capacity of many of our eligible students and that the nature of our response makes their matriculation feasible.

Our need is to take into consideration the entirety of the costs accruing to students and their families with regard to participating in higher education, the manner in which we recognize and balance the individual private and the overall social benefits of higher education, and the extent to which we are willing to subject our students to a future burdened by large loan debt.

- **Our need for a financial aid strategy that meets our goals:**

California should adopt clear metrics for measuring whether our goals are achieved by our financial aid policies. In designing those financial aid policies, we should evaluate the use of incentives that can help us reach our desired outcomes.

IV. Quality

The pledge of California's original Master Plan for Higher Education included, along with universal access and affordability, the assurance of quality.

Quality will be required in order for California to provide a higher education that will serve to keep California competitive in our global economy, especially because of the tripling now by both our global competitors, India and the People's Republic of China, of the annual number of PhDs in science and technology above those produced by the entire United States.

In this regard, it is essential that the dimension of "quality" be examined and articulated, especially according to the definition of quality as "those capacities and skills that are essential for preparing Californians to live and work constructively in this 21st century."

V. Preparation for Higher Education and Workforce Development.

- **Our need for adequately preparing our students to undertake higher education:**

While this dimension is primarily the responsibility of our California K-12 schools, their well being and success are interdependent with our system of higher education, both in what higher education demands in the way of preparation by our K-12 systems, and because our system of higher education prepares almost all of the educators who will operate our systems of K-12 education.

Hence it is essential that our system of higher education pay explicit attention to its roles and responsibilities as an effective partner in adequate preparation of students for admission to, and success in, higher education and in the effective preparation of teachers for our K-12 system.

In addition, more could be done to bring California's concurrent enrollment policy closer to fulfilling its potential as an important tool in meeting the State's educational challenges. Existing concurrent enrollment efforts are tightly focused on college-level and advanced-education opportunities; however California policies could be altered to promote even greater participation for those who are able to take college-level classes. California would benefit from the creation of more robust local partnerships between high schools and the Community College System in order to allow and encourage career-technical education opportunities, better shared use of vocational equipment and resources, coursework in basic skills and remediation, high school exit exam preparation, programs targeted at drop-out intervention and prevention, instruction in English as a second language, and other opportunities designed to meet the needs of local communities.

- **Our need for advancing career technical education, in both K-12 and higher education:**

The partnership between K-12 and higher education should include advancement of rigorous career technical education – especially in both K-12 and community colleges, so that students who do not choose to seek a four year degree may yet gain the benefits of productive careers, helping eliminate the stigma too often attached to those not seeking a four year degree or graduate study.

The needs of the new millennium will require a unified career technical education and workforce development system. Moving forward, it is critical that entities such as government, business, labor, community-based organizations, and other education and workforce stakeholders come together to develop a comprehensive approach.

VI. Effective Articulation and Coordination:

- **Our need for coordination and efficiency in our delivery of higher education with sufficient authority placed in a coordinating body:**

The State and people of California do not have unlimited resources to fund our system of higher education. Hence it is essential that we have some designated agency with the role, responsibility, and capacity for advising the Legislature and Governor, the Segments of higher education and the California public with regard to essential coordination and needed efficiency in our delivery of higher education.

- **Our need for an agreed-upon system of simple, ready articulation, between our segments of higher education, grounded in a transfer associate degree:**

The original California Master Plan for Higher Education expected that our three public segments of California's higher education would operate as a system, with prescribed differentiation of functions, yet all collaborating to facilitate and assure the steady progress of each and every student from preparation through accessibility onto completion.

The State and People of California do not have the luxury of wasting resources and time in an unnecessarily complex system of articulation among our segments of higher education. We need instead for all stakeholders in our respective segments to come together and adopt an agreed-upon, clear and effective system of articulation, including a transfer associate degree.

This student centered approach will help students move more quickly toward their goals.

VII. Accountability – both fiscal and programmatic:

The establishment of statewide goals for California higher education attuned to the public interest of the people and State of California will enable increased accountability across the entire system and within segments. Such increased accountability, with increased efficiencies, must be both fiscal and programmatic.

- **Our need for a new focus on completion and results:**

It is no longer sufficient for our primary focus to be upon getting our students into our system of higher education. Our systems must lead our students systematically and readily to complete their courses of study in a timely manner. Best estimates show that, unless we improve our outcomes, by 2025 we will fall over one million postsecondary degrees short of the number needed for a robust economy in a global marketplace.

- **Our need for simultaneous commitment to quality higher education, to maintain California's distinction and our capacity to keep California competitive in our now globalized economy:**

Our system must be accountable for results without sacrificing quality.

- **Our need to close the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students and communities:**

Our need for an educated populace capable of filling the necessary jobs to maintain a globally competitive economy requires education of disadvantaged communities traditionally underserved. The system must be accountable for closing the achievement gap in ways that do not require or allow restricting access to disadvantaged communities.

- **Our need for utilizing technology to meet our fiscal and programmatic challenges:**

As new technologies arise we must be flexible and open to new methods of higher education delivery and to the use of data systems that both provide information about outcomes and create efficiency in operations.

- **Our need for increased transparency:**

Transparency must be increased as part of an accountability system focused on meeting statewide goals. It will help us to find the optimum balance between administrative costs, teaching costs and other expenses.

VIII. Sufficient Financing:

The test of our goals, aspirations, commitment and of our capacity to assure the future well-being of the State and People of California is to be found in the arena of funding, and whether and how we in the California Legislature, together with the Governor and the people of California, prove willing and able to provide the funding essential to our meeting the needs of the California system of higher education.

- **Our need to establish and articulate the nexus between public investment and public benefit:**

California needs a sound financing mechanism aligned with statewide goals to ensure that our state's needs are met. In determining the respective funding commitments, a clear nexus must be established between public financing and the economic benefits to the state, so that both the level of public investment and the return on that investment are articulated and verifiable.

Moving Forward:

- **Our need for the support of the people of California for our Committee's Public Agenda of Needs for California Higher Education:**

It is essential, as we complete our work and file our report with its findings and recommendations with respect to the future of California higher education, and do our very best to shepherd our recommendations into enactment and successful implementation, that we recognize the importance of a comprehensive strategic action plan for enlisting the active and ardent commitment and support of the people of California. Toward that end, our agenda of needs for higher education must clearly articulate the correlation between public investment and public benefit.

The Committee recommends that the Joint Committee on the Master Plan for Higher Education be extended into 2011 to continue the work completed thus far.