California Postsecondary Education Commission

Next Steps in the Development of the Commission's Higher Education Accountability Framework

March 2007

This report updates the Commission on progress toward implementing the recommendations adopted in March 2005 to establish a higher education accountability framework to improve the performance and quality of higher education in California.

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The Commission advises the Governor and the Legislature on higher education policy and fiscal issues. Its primary focus is to ensure that the State's educational resources are used effectively to provide Californians with postsecondary education opportunities. More information about the Commission is available at www.cpec.ca.gov.

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Progress to Date

In September 2004, the Commission evaluated efforts by states and the federal government to improve the performance of postsecondary institutions by developing accountability frameworks with clear goals and regular performance assessments.

In March 2005, after considerable study, the Commission adopted five recommendations for the development of a higher education accountability framework for California:

1. *The Legislature should enact a statutory accountability framework to assess the performance and effectiveness of public colleges and universities in meeting the State's needs.*
2. *Priority should be put first on developing a framework that assists State policymakers in the governance of higher education; and subsequently, efforts should be made to build capacity within the framework to assist higher education consumers.*
3. *The accountability framework should have at least five goals—enhance access and diversity, improve student success, ensure quality education, benefit the public, and further administrative efficiency.*
4. *Specific indicators should be adopted to measure progress toward achieving each goal.*
5. *Legislation should delegate authority to the Commission to develop and implement the framework and should provide resources to do so.*

Establishing an Advisory Committee

The Commission established an Accountability Technical Advisory Committee (ATAC) with representatives from the public and private university systems, the community colleges system, the Department of Education, and other education stakeholders to supply advice on performance measures that should be used in a higher education accountability framework. In June 2006, the Commission reviewed a report, based on the work of the advisory committee, recommending that an accountability framework be developed incorporating four goals:

- Reasonable and Equitable Higher Education Opportunity for Prepared Students
- Affordable and Accessible Higher Education
- Student Success in Higher Education
- Public Benefit

The report also recommended the use of 17 specific performance measures to assess progress toward meeting the four goals.

A fifth goal for administrative efficiency was identified for inclusion in the framework. However, the advisory committee could not agree on effective measures for that goal, and discussion of appropriate measures was deferred.

The Commission was also presented with a work plan that anticipated the release of a working paper on each measure when completed, with the intent to issue a final report with conclusions and recommendations in 2007.

In December 2006, the Commission received the first three performance reports measuring the success of students in California's public universities to earn timely degrees, persist in their progress toward four-year degrees, and transfer from community colleges to State public universities.

At the March 2007 meeting, the Commission received three more of the 17 performance indicator reports and a summary report assessing how well California's public college students are succeeding.

Next Steps in 2007

The Commission plans to complete reports for the remaining eleven performance measures by December 2007. These measures will be delivered to the Commission in the following phased approach at the June, September and December 2007 meetings:

- **June 2007 Commission Meeting—Public Benefit:** The Commission will receive an assessment of how well higher education is meeting its mission to promote economic growth, civic well-being and social development through the delivery of higher education. The Commission will receive a summary assessment and three performance measure reports addressing: (1) degrees in areas of workforce need; (2) education attainment of young adults; and (3) personal income growth associated with higher education attainment.
- **September 2007 Commission Meeting—Affordable and Accessible Higher Education:** The Commission will receive a summary assessment of affordability and accessibility, as well as three performance measure reports addressing: (1) racial representation in the State's public higher education systems; (2) student indebtedness; and (3) income required to pay for college.
- **December 2007 Commission Meeting—Reasonable and Equitable Education Opportunity for Prepared Students:** The Commission will receive a summary assessment of college opportunities

for students, as well as four performance measure reports addressing: (1) college readiness; (2) English & math proficiency; (3) high school diplomas and GEDs; and (4) basic skill proficiency.

- **December 2007 Commission Meeting—Final 2007 Public Higher Education Accountability Report:** This report will assess the findings of the 17 performance measure reports and identify promising options for State lawmakers to consider in regard to areas of higher education improvement.

In addition to the preceding schedule for the roll-out of the 2007 accountability framework report, several interim steps are planned in the next nine months that are targeted at improving the accountability framework

March 2007—Support Higher Education Accountability Framework Legislation: Senate Bill 325 introduced by Senator Jack Scott substantially embraces the Commission's higher education accountability framework and, if enacted, specifies the Commission as the agency responsible for California's postsecondary accountability system. Commission staff testified on the Commission accountability framework at a January 31, 2007, legislative hearing.

April 2007—ATAC Meeting: The Commission will convene the Accountability Technical Advisory Committee to review the lessons learned in preparing the initial accountability measure reports, and will collect input on strategies for improving and strengthening performance measures.

December 2007—Lessons Learned Report: An assessment will be presented to the Commission summarizing the major lessons learned from the first-year efforts to develop a State higher education accountability framework. The Commission will review recommendations for improvements to be incorporated into a second-year effort.

Developing an accountability system is an arduous and challenging task. Until such time that legislation delegating additional resources to support the accountability framework is enacted, progress will be slow in this effort given other tasks assigned to the Commission. Nevertheless, the Commission has already been recognized for its leadership to improve accountability and as the appropriate agency to provide the leadership to forge a workable higher education accountability system necessary to improve the performance of higher education in California.