

39 Palo Verde River Consortium

Plans & Goals - Consortium Approved

Executive Summary

The three strategies/visions identified in the current three-year plan remain the same: (1) continue to improve and expand existing programs,(2) develop and implement prioritized pilots, and (3) participate in expanding regional economic opportunities. An additional strategy has been added to the plan: (4) as part of a statewide Program Improvement Plan (PIP), The River Consortium has been asked to focus on both increasing enrollment and improving data reliability and reporting. This PIP effort is designed ultimately to reduce the consortium's cost-per-student, thus keeping it in line with similar rural, geographically challenged consortia. The PIP will be distributed under separate cover. Until recently, it seemed conceivable that programs would expand to in-person delivery beginning in January 2022, but current trends related to assorted hesitations and variants, will likely require adjustments to programs. The pandemic future is still unclear. Existing programs have continued to both improve and expand with the opening of a second Parent Program that is leveraged with both Needles Head Start and Needles Unified School District. Additionally, the Parent Program that began with Palo Verde Unified has completed its second cohort and will begin its third cohort this fall. Each of these programs continues to improve and expand through self-assessment. ESL, Citizenship, and GED continue to work on expanding enrollments and improving outcomes. Using recent experience with virtual tools along with the plans to expand capacity, marketing and support services, the consortium is committed to continuing, improving, and expanding these programs and services. Implementing prioritized pilots has been the core focus of the three-year and related annual plans and remains the core focus of this annual plan as well as the plan associated with the PIP effort. Prioritized pilots include opening branch/satellite programs off the main campus and within the city limits of Blythe. Plans are underway to open ESL, GED and Computer Literacy classes at two PVUSD neighborhood schools as well as the community center that serves the Mesa Verde community. Regional economic opportunities, despite the pandemic constraints, indicate a positive trend in both Blythe and Needles. Within the Blythe community, a partnership was formed with a local civil engineering company, the Holt Group and an international utility giant, NextEra. The project harnesses, stores, and distributes energy developed through solar collection systems. Additionally, there is significant talk and early development efforts around extending the existing runway of the Blythe Airport. Needless to say, an extended runway opens up logistics and recreational options which in turn lead to workforce needs and employment opportunities. As in many California cities, retail cannabis products have produced private profits as well as city revenues. Blythe has one cannabis retail store in full operation and licenses are available for further development of additional retail stores. Within the Needles community, the economic forecast is equally encouraging. The current unemployment rate is 2.2%, the lowest of all San Bernardino County cities. The population continues to grow steadily, albeit slowly. Cannabis growth and distribution businesses are driving the current growth and positive economic trends. As a result of cannabis investments, there are 425 new and actively working employees with the potential to continue to grow the workforce as housing, recreation, hospitality, and social services expand to support the growing cannabis workforce and its related needs. Increasing enrollment and improving data processes are the key goals of the PIP that focus on strategies and tactics ultimately designed to lower the cost-per-student of consortia funded programs. The River Consortium has been working for the past few months to address enrollment and data issues with a plan that expands the operating capacity of the consortium to include key Palo Verde College staff. Self-assessment focus groups with current and proposed staff have addressed attitude, awareness, usage, needs, effectiveness, and current data processes – from registration, to enrollment, to outcomes. Along with current leadership, WestEd has been retained to help with both expanding capacity and improving data processes. Implementation of the PIP, transition stage, will begin the first week of September.

Regional Planning Overview

The River Consortium in many ways defines rural and remote. It's no less than 100 miles from anything considered a major city; its borders are 100 miles apart; aside from agriculture and prisons, it has no major industries; and it's primarily accessible only by car (as opposed to plane or train). The three member districts are Palo Verde College, Palo Verde Unified and Needles Unified. Palo Verde Unified has about 4,000 students; Needles Unified has about 1,000 students and Palo Verde College has about 2,500 students. The City of Blythe has a population of about 14,000 (excluding 5,000 prisoners) and the City of Needles has about 5,000 residents. Non-member partners of the Palo Verde Consortium are two Indian nations: Chemehuevi and the

Fort Mojave Indian Tribe (FMIT). A little less than half of the Blythe population are Latino and speak “other than English” [Spanish] at home. Both cities have a significant number of residents who lack high school diplomas or GEDs: Blythe about 3,500 and Needles about 500. Adult Education/non-credit programs are offered through Palo Verde College (PVC), like those offered at Pasadena, San Diego, Glendale, and San Francisco community colleges. Currently ESL, Citizenship Preparation, Basic Skills, GED Preparation, and Parenting programs are offered through PVC. Most Adult Education classes are offered at the college campuses, limiting access to many because of transportation and childcare issues. Planning for the upcoming year focuses on bringing adult/non-credit classes to accessible venues (branches/satellites) like neighborhood schools, libraries, community centers, churches, and worksites. In keeping with the PIP challenge, new venues will increase enrollment and thus reduce the cost-per-student concern of Sacramento leadership. The consortium Leadership Group will revisit opportunities related to prisons, farmworkers, and students with access challenges who would benefit from virtual/on-line programs. In keeping with statewide priorities, the following briefly outlines some of the projects underway and/or anticipated as we move towards 2022:

Leadership: The consortium will leverage resources with PVC staff by expanding its leadership capacity to include the Dean of Instruction, Associate Dean of Counseling, director of Student Success and Equity, and, as needed, additional support staff.

Learner Transition: PVC, the LEA, will continue to expand and improve bi-lingual career/guided pathways. Concurrent and dual enrollment programs will continue to improve and expand with K-12 seniors from Blythe and Needles. Through a bi-lingual electronic tool, Career Cruising/Xello, English Learners (EL), high school seniors as well as non-credit PVC students will be included in the guided pathways PVC efforts. Having the Associate Dean of Counseling join the enrollment/operating effort will help ease seamless transitions for high school, EL and other non-credit students.

Marketing: A marketing team will identify, implement, and measure the strategies/tactics required to convert student needs into actual enrollments.

Program Development: Solar Panel Installation classes should begin the spring of 2022. These classes will be available for both credit and non-credit students. Consortium resources will be leveraged with PVC workforce funds. With the addition of the Director of Student Success and Equity, state funds will expand services to include non-credit students. Initial interest and early discussions have begun around agricultural and comprehensive drone technology and drone piloting. The Seventh Day Adventist Church in Blythe expressed interest in developing a “community translator” program. The consortium/college plans to explore PVC/consortium opportunities for both staff and residents at Chuckwalla and Ironwood State Prisons. The Blythe area has a significant permanent farmworker population (primarily Latino) and an equally significant migrant worker population (also primarily Latino). Pilots will be explored for these cohorts. The pandemic has opened options for hybrid/blended programs that incorporate both in-person and virtual learning. These options will be explored going forward. Additionally, the pandemic opened opportunities to service students whose lives and schedules prohibit traditional in-person classes.

Program Evaluation: Currently, program evaluation is guided by CASAS’ Learning Gains, as measured through pre-and post-testing. WestEd has been contracted to develop recommendations designed to gauge student performance and ultimately measure and report outcomes as outlined in CAEP legislation. The ultimate and critical evaluations will relate to implementations and progress as described in the PIP. College, consortium, and workforce teams will require greater transparency, cooperation, communication, planning, tracking, and measurement as implementation goes forward. Consortium planning will continue with virtual tools.

Meeting Regional Needs

Regional Need #1

Gaps in Service / Regional Needs

While there was a period of post-pandemic hope, that hope has changed to caution. Pandemic risks are once again factors in all aspects of education, and until infection rates begin to trend downward, the most important gaps still relate to the pandemic. Will there be in-person classes? Will there be virtual classes? Will there be hybrid versions? Will masks be required? Will there be mandated vaccinations? Will there be mandated COVID testing? This COVID-related series of unknowns remain the most critical gaps. We are all waiting for guidance from local regions, Sacramento, and Washington. Until there is clarity around how to move forward, the consortium should explore opportunities that are driven by pandemic constraints: virtual/distance programs, on-line/turnkey classes, e-counseling, expanding leveraging opportunities, developing virtual research and measurement tools, and coordinating efforts that will enhance examining and implementing best practices. Beyond issues related to the pandemic, the consortium enrollment deficiency remains the biggest gap and thus the biggest challenge. The PIP [separate cover] outlines the key strategies designed to increase enrollment and data reliability. The Plan, more importantly, also describes and develops implementation/leadership teams, creates plans and timelines designed

to increase enrollment, and assigns a data consultant to work with the leadership group to improve data processes and credibility. With or without the pandemic, virtual/on-line learning is here to stay. Helping parents navigate classroom tools such as Chromebooks is a gap that should be addressed with CAEP resources. The equity gap remains an ongoing challenge, although the consortium has made some progress with bi-lingual electronic career/guided pathways. Further, discussions have begun around developing strategies that would improve awareness and usage of the Black community. Through recent workforce-related research, we learned that ESL students were not aware, and thus not accessing, many of the services that might help them transition to the workplace and/or post-secondary programs. Another gap involves general awareness and usage of college services (including counseling) for consortium-funded students.

How do you know? What resources did you use to identify these gaps?

The consortium conducted two studies in partnership with WestEd, both of which helped identify the gaps as well as suggest strategies: Workforce Surveys with English and Spanish-speaking students with Employer Interviews related to hiring and promoting. The second study, a qualitative discussion/focus group again in partnership with WestEd, was PIP-related and designed to understand attitude, awareness, and usage of adult education programs and resources. Another study, considered by this writer as a “best practice” was conducted by the West End Corridor Consortium (Chaffey group). This bi-lingual survey combined customer satisfaction, attitude, awareness, and usage – particularly as related to virtual/on-line tools that have been used for instruction, counseling, communications, orientation, and registration. Beyond these three studies, gaps were identified through public media, economic outlook reports, demographic reports, interviews, and strategic planning. The need to help parents with challenges related to “schooling-at-home,” particularly around use of new electronic tools, is an apparent universal challenge.

How will you measure effectiveness / progress towards meeting this need?

WestEd has been retained to work with the consortium/college to design processes that will develop “friendlier” and more effective measurement tools – driven by more reliable data. Career/Guided electronic pathways have built-in tracking and intervention tools so that students can seamlessly achieve their pathway goals. All measurements will be driven by improving enrollment, employment, salary increases, and post-secondary education/training.

Gaps In Service

New Strategies

Strategy #1

After no less than 12 months experience with the educational challenges associated with the pandemic, safe and effective delivery and marketing best practices should be shared and implemented. Palo Verde College should participate in local, state, and federal briefings on how to improve, measure, and expand instructional services during this pandemic.

Strategy #2

Increase enrollments primarily through implementation of satellite/branch programs. [See PIP for details] Expand enrollments through marketing strategies and teams that identify referring agencies and staff, “upsell” to existing students, expand awareness of opportunities and outcomes/benefits. Examine the provision of childcare to be offered while students attend consortium-funded classes.

Strategy #3

Improve bi-lingual support services including counseling, tutoring, and financial aid. Leverage consortium resources with K-12 and college counselors. [See PIP on expanding capacity]

Strategy #4

Examine and promote the idea of consortium-funded students gaining from benefits noted in the 2021/22 state budget that addresses needy community college students.

Seamless Transitions

New Strategies

Strategy #1

Continue to develop career/guided pathways for all consortium-funded students. Pathways will reflect state priorities by emphasizing those skills leading to employment, higher wages, and post-secondary programs. Maximize the use of the bilingual Career Cruising/Xello program, especially since a staff person has been identified to assure the proper use and expansion of this program.

Strategy #2

Utilize the allowable state authorization for dual and concurrent enrollment of 18-year-old high school and adult students.

Strategy #3

Create English Learner (EL) pathways for high school students that allow for transitioning to Palo Verde College's English as a Second Language program. This pathway would include an orientation class that would introduce EL students to college counselors, services, and career options.

Student Acceleration

New Strategies

Strategy #1

By expanding CTE advanced placement through "tech prep," courses/contracts and/or exams, students can demonstrate skills, avoid redundant pre-requisites, and accelerate pathways.

Strategy #2

High school and adult students, already concurrently and/or dual enrolled will ease acceleration and reduce barriers in transitioning.

Strategy #3

Seek reentry into the federal WIOA/EL Civics program to promote an acceleration of student progress, with potential earned revenues supporting the instructional program and increasing student services. Identify a WIOA Coordinator who can begin preparing for the re-entry process.

Professional Development

New Strategies

Strategy #1

Using the recently developed Overview of Adult Education in California, provide training to existing and proposed CAEP staff, inclusive of history, recent legislative scope, programmatic options and opportunities, funding, oversight, and criteria for assessment.

Strategy #2

Under the direction of the Career Cruising/Xello coordinator, provide information and training to staff on the appropriate use of this tool as a key method to develop and track Career/Guided Pathways for all students.

Strategy #3

Support staff participation in professional organizations focused on adult education and workforce preparation.

Strategy #4

As described in the PIP (page 7), a series of professional development topics are scheduled beginning in September 2021 with follow up in the fall and through 2022:•Overview of adult Education,•Career/Guided Pathways,•Marketing Development – increase enrollment,•Data Processes (following recommendations from WestEd,•Ongoing qualitative student focus-group like discussions facilitated by counseling,

Leveraging Resources

New Strategies

Strategy #1

In keeping with the main challenge of the PIP, increasing enrollment, leadership capacity will increase to include community college staff who will join a team devoted to increasing enrollment, improving outcomes, and promoting post-secondary options. Consortium and college resources will be leveraged to accomplish this expansion.

Strategy #2

As the adult programs seek to expand through satellite/branch offerings, leveraged partnerships will develop to create new venues along with associated costs. These partnerships will involve public/private entities with available/qualified facilities. Some of these partnerships involve school sites, churches, county community centers, tribal nations facilities, libraries, city halls, and virtual programs that exist on internet and/or cloud sites.

Strategy #3

Examine how adult (non-credit) students can benefit from those state budget line items earmarked for needy community college students.

Strategy #4

Seek resources that are under the auspices of regional workforce boards that have been earmarked for assisting students, especially in job skills training. In the past, federal workforce funds have been available to assist students with tools, uniforms, and testing fees.

Fiscal Management

A narrative justifying how the planned allocations are consistent with the annual adult education plan which is based on your CAEP 3-year plan.

Considering that the pandemic remains the operational wild-card, allocations will adjust to the evolving delivery needs that are constrained by CDC and other government entities. To the extent that the consortium funds, per PIP will be prioritized to increase enrollment, we will use funds to improve marketing, create satellite partners, expand capacity, expand services, and improve data processes.

An approach to incorporating remaining carry-over funds from prior year(s) into strategies planned for 2021-22.

Carry-over funds have all been allocated to existing and/or evolving projects and pilots. These are primarily related to the PIP and the development of accessible satellite branches, thereby increasing enrollment. As before, funding decisions are informed by Consortium vision, guiding principles, and appropriate statutory provisions. Given the challenges, constraints, and uncertainties associated with the pandemic, fiscal management requires an almost daily real-time evaluation of use of funds – as resources are adjusted. Nonetheless, all fiscal reporting is posted on the project management tool, Board Docs, for review by members and stakeholders.

Certification

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