“At the same time, CEPF projects are seeing significant progress with policy change occurring as local high schools adopt the Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum (ERWC), leading to a better alignment with English curriculum at our community colleges. Our common assessment/placement test project is also moving ahead and the test development will be completed this spring. Fundamental change is occurring at the local level, guided by the people who know best how to plan and implement this change: faculty and staff. Our efforts are student centered. This is making a difference in people’s lives, as you’ll see in the newsletter articles that follow.”
For educators, one of the best parts of being involved in reaching the goals outlined in the CEPF grant is “the opportunity to be a trailblazer,” according to Sandy McGlothlin, Counselor and Matriculation Coordinator at West Hills College Coalinga. She and a team she works with are focused on creating common assessment standards and already have a blueprint for what will become the standard placement test for entering community college students in those participating schools that make up the C6 Consortium in the Central Valley of California.

Ultimately, there would be a common assessment test for California’s community college system, the largest in the United States, which serves 2.6 million students annually. “We wanted to take the lead on what the state has mandated, and that’s a common cut score for transfer level English and degree level math at each participating college,” she said. A “cut score” is just what it sounds like; students have to reach a minimum score to ‘make the cut’ and be placed in college level classes; otherwise, remedial courses are required.

She’s one of the three lead faculty members across the central valley who are contributing time and energy to the project, along with Mai Meidinger at Merced College and Ryen Hirata at Willow International.

“It’s a huge geographic area,” McGlothlin said of the C6 region that stretches from Delta College (Stockton) in the north to Bakersfield College in the south, 13 colleges in all.

“We started meeting last fall with encouragement from the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, which was looking for a region to do a pilot project to develop and use a common assessment and placement test. We thought it’d be a great idea to come together and come to consensus on a common test instrument and a common cut score for transfer level English and degree level math – which are under discussion. “The matriculation part of my job covers assessment at West Hills College Coalinga and I was invited to be one of three lead faculties that are involved. We’ve been meeting as group each month and we all went to Convergence 2 in Visalia in December. A vendor (McCann Associates) met with us and we worked together and created a blueprint. It was really a cool meeting where faculty did a lot of good collaboration on the standards which are in line with the California CORE and developed the blueprint for the actual test we eventually will use.”

The group met again at Willow International (a part of Reedley College) in March where they planned a process for streamlining the diagnostic tests found in assessment testing. The goal, she said, “is that when students enter into the colleges’ testing environment, if they don’t score a certain range on the initial adaptive test, they will receive a placement recommendation but also transition to a diagnostic exam to identify specifically what they need to work on.”

The common assessment work is complex and requires a lot of attention to detail, McGlothlin pointed out. “It’s not an easy thing to do. The Chancellor’s Office requires a test to be put on probationary status in order for the C6 colleges to pilot the test. A lot of work goes along with it. I have been impressed with the level of participation we’ve had. It’s a huge project.”

“Working with the sister colleges in C6 has also been a positive experience, she added. “Collegiality with the other schools, working together, it’s been great. In a few cases, dates haven’t worked for everyone, but we are moving forward with as many as can be there. The goal is to have a testing instrument where the C6 colleges that have a common cut score range for transfer level English and degree level math which can be used at any of our colleges.”

She praised faculty members for their commitment to the project. “Faculty involvement is crucial in this type of...
endeavor. There had been a need for more faculty buy-in and the Convergence helped in that regard. I expect the result will be a lot more ownership of the assessment instrument that we will be using.”

Achieving a common assessment test from the current blueprint and getting it ready to roll out will take more time, McGlothlin predicted. “The preliminary testing instrument will have to be reviewed and pilot tested with students at the beginning of the semester. Data will be sent back to the vendor to determine the common ‘cut’ and then we’ll have two years to gather and validate the data for reliability and success rates in classes. But a year from now we’ll be able to measure outcomes in coursework against their basic test scores and further refine the process.

“Our goal is to have faculty sign off on the standard and diagnostic blueprints in March and be able to review the actual assessment test between now and the end of the year as we await the Chancellor’s office decision on having the test put on probationary status. Once that happens, we feel we can use the test for data gathering and possible course placement as early as October for students wanting to enroll in Spring 2014. The C6 Consortium colleges participating, many of which have large student enrollments, will be instrumental in the sample size for the validity and reliability studies needed to get the test on the approved list to use. We’ll be able to accomplish that on our timeline.

“It’s going to be a great tool for our Central Valley colleges, with the hope that when the community colleges receive funding for the Student Success Initiative of a mandated common assessment instrument, some of this work will help with the decision-making. It’s good to be the trailblazer!”

Common Assessments, continued from page 2

Convergence III Will Bring Industry Partners together with the Ag and Manufacturing and the Alternative Energy RED Teams

Industry Partners and the Ag and Manufacturing and the Alternative Energy RED Teams will gather for Convergence III on April 19 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Tulare. “C6 programs in the Ag and Manufacturing or Alternative Energy are required to participate and are strongly encouraged to bring two to three industry partners with them,” said Karri Hammerstrom, C6 Grant Coordinator, Reedley College. The sessions:

- Presentation of the results of the Central Region Consortium’s Skills Standards process with the Food Processing manufacturers identifying specific training needs for Maintenance Mechanics. The process can be replicated in other areas.
- Luncheon speaker(panel on critical thinking and problem solving.
- Employer panel on piloting MSSC training for current employees.
- “Meet the Industry” Introductory Class Model: Reedley College CTE Faculty and Industrial Technology Department Chair David Tikkanen will share his intro class model designed to introduce students to the career field and perspective employers the first week of the program.

The venue: Southern California Edison Energy Education Center, 4175 South Laspina Street, Tulare (across from the Heritage Complex/Tulare Agri-Center). Reserve your seat today! The event is free, but reservations are required. RSVP by April 15, with names, contact information to karri.hammerstrom@reedleycollege.edu.

Healthcare RED Team Will Video-Conference on April 16

The C6 TAACCCT Healthcare RED Team will host a “Convergence for Industry Partners in Healthcare” on April 16 from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. The format: video-conferences at Bakersfield College, Cerro Coso, Fresno City College, and West Hills College Lemoore. Industry partner managers and clinical educators working with each college healthcare program are invited. The video-conference will focus on C6 program updates and innovations. Attendees at each college will then discuss specific needs and strategies related to their programs. Participants unable to be present at the convergence can join discussions via CCC Conference.
Reedley College's approach to the C6 grant-funded program has been to prepare job candidates for new careers in high-wage, high-skills fields such as Manufacturing, Mechanized Agriculture and Automotive Programs, according to Karri Hammerstrom, C6 Grant Program Coordinator at the college southeast of Fresno, part of the State Center Community College District.

Hammerstrom said that half-way through the first year of cohorts, notable progress is being made. “We are targeting approximately 100 program completers a year for the next three school years,” she said. “We are already seeing early program successes resulting from the development of a basic skills and supportive services plan tailored to the C6 programs. The plan includes an assigned counselor, study hours, and embedded peer tutors. Students are required to submit educational plans. Faculty is working with industry champions to develop or solidify job placement and internship opportunities with area employers. Students are being trained and working towards third-party certifications. Faculty has undergone special training and we are working with the partnering programs and C6 resources to development Open Educational Resource materials for Supplemental Instruction.”

One of the things that makes the program work is that expectations are clearly defined, Hammerstrom said. “We tell students they can learn to qualify for a career that combines technology with hands-on experience, to train for a career they can be proud of and for which they will receive internship opportunities and job leads. We will do everything we can to help the student be successful. But the expectations are high and the student must be committed to achieve success.

“When they become part of the program, students become part of a cohort of students with whom they will take all their classes. Those classes are block-scheduled so students are assured they’ll get them when they register. The students complete program pathways, guided by a Student Education Plan. They are required to complete homework and must access online supplemental training modules, take and pass national certifications and assessments, and participate in Student Success sessions. We tell them if they are up to the challenge, we are willing to invest in their future.”

Students enrolled in the three Reedley programs train for such jobs as technicians and mechanics for both farm and construction equipment, including diesel trucks; machinists or welders, mechanics specializing in engine repair, electrical systems, transmission and brake repair, heating and air conditioning technicians and a long list of similar occupations, according to David Tikkanen, Manufacturing Faculty.

Halfway Through the First Year, Reedley College is Making Great Progress

Reedley College, continued on page 5
“It’s all part of the TAACCCT grant initiative to not only improve retention and achievement rates at our colleges, but to reduce the time for completion of degrees and certificates – especially where technical skills are concerned,” Hammerstrom said. “At a time of historically high unemployment, there are many jobs that can’t be filled by potential employers simply because there isn’t a big enough skilled labor pool. Thanks to this grant, we are creating new opportunities for people to get trained for jobs that are actually available so they can go to work.”

Besides Reedley, other colleges participating in the Ag and Manufacturing C6 programs include College of the Sequoias, Merced College, West Hills College Lemoore, West Hills College Coalinga, Bakersfield College, and Cerro Coso College.

California Colleges are Creating Their Own Textbooks

Bakersfield College, Fresno City College, Merced College, and West Hills College are the colleges whose LVN-RN programs are part of the Healthcare Team in the TAACCCT grant. Together they are focused on Open Educational Resources (OER), which means they are developing their own textbooks using web resources and modules written by faculty. Feedback from faculty, students, and employers was also considered. The web has made it possible for colleges to create some of their own textbooks, which offer several advantages: They can be customized to fit the district, region or market served by potential employers and their needs; they can be easily updated; they can be downloaded by students and faculty to mobile devices; and the cost is a fraction of the price of traditional textbooks.

This concept is one of the higher education reforms sweeping California, led by the consortium of C6 colleges in the Central Valley, according to a trio of Registered Nurses we talked to at Fresno City College: Nancy Hoff, MSN, RN, Healthcare RED Team lead, faculty emeritus; Stephanie Robinson, MHA, RN, Director of Nursing, C6 college lead for the grant; and Jennifer Adams, MSN, RN, C6 faculty for LVN-RN.

Hoff said Bakersfield, Fresno City and Merced began using the Licensed Vocational Nurse-to-Registered Nurse textbook for the Transition Course in January. West Hills College will start using it for the cohort that starts in Fall 2013. “We’re in the process of doing Version 2, based on student and faculty feedback; periodic revisions are part of the plan,” Hoff said. All four colleges whose LVN-RN programs are part of the grant will work together to supplement and revise the math section of the book to reflect the current standards of practice among healthcare providers. The second version of the books will be ready by summer session.

Textbooks, continued on page 6
The work has progressed at a rapid pace, according to Hoff. “We all met in April 2012 to create a book. We started by choosing a course we knew we could do, after reviewing many open educational resources. We met face to face and by conference call and had all the modules done before we met with our consultants at 20 Million Minds at the Convergence in Visalia last December. And it was in use by January.” Robinson chimed in: “We did this all in eight months. We’re fast!”

Hoff said the LVN-to-RN book for the Transition Course was a good place to start, not only because of the abundance of open information available but because “there is no one book that meets the needs of all the students for this course.” Research also showed there were two other textbooks where the same circumstances applied. As a result, a Medical Assistant text is almost finished and work has begun on a textbook for a Physical Therapy Aide course. In addition, a Psychiatric Technician textbook is nearing completion.

For LVNs who are completing RN training, the cost benefits are significant. “The students were formerly required to buy four separate books for this course,” said Adams. “There were two skills books, a math book and a transitions book. We took all four of these away and had one book that covers all of it. The cost of those four books was about $120 total. It is now $6.95 to get a link and download the book to up to three devices such as a laptop, tablet, pc or phone.” If they prefer, students can buy a hard copy of the book for $25.

“What we find is that students really like it,” Adams said. “We are teaching LVNs who are already working as professionals. Access to their books became easier.”

All three women cited the professional collaboration as one of the high points of the textbook projects.

“In healthcare, we already have a collaborative model in working together and that allows us to move much faster in developing changes to curriculum,” said Robinson. “We have an established working group within each of the colleges to align the programs. There could have been a lot of pushback and political issues that might have come into play, but we haven’t had that. It’s wonderful.”

Adams said colleagues at other colleges “were asking how they could become more innovative and lower the cost for their programs, how they could improve student outcomes, the quality of education, build teamwork and collaboration, and utilize OER. They talked about how textbook costs have become prohibitive for a lot of students because a lot of our students come from lower economic levels and have families and other financial responsibilities.”

Hoff said all the people she’s worked with are passionate about collaborating on the projects. “It has made my coordinating this very, very easy. We all work together, we all move forward at a nice pace. I think that’s because that’s how we learned to work together and communicate as healthcare professionals. We share the same goals.”

She also said the word is getting out about the work being done here in the Central Valley. “We just had a conference call from some educators from Arkansas to see what we were doing. They were very excited.”
Give the healthcare faculty a chance to talk about their nursing programs and they are passionate about the work, the students, and the positive impact of the program.

Jennifer Adams, MSN, RN, C6 Faculty for the LVN-RN Class at Fresno City College, is more passionate than most. Not many people get worked up about a government grant, but just ask her what kind of impact the TAACCCT Grant has made in her life and in the life of her students.

“One of the things I talk about when I’m asked about the grant and how it has changed what we do is I discuss the grant in detail. I researched it and I explain that it’s a U.S. Department of Labor push to improve the quality and accessibility of education, and the speed at which we can get our students ready for employment.

“I talk about the Eight Guiding Principles and how important they are. For me, I have a real sense of pride working under this grant because it involves our government. It makes me feel proud and patriotic to work on something so essential for our community and that in a larger sense contributes to our country’s economy. As a result, there is a sense of community within our school and our student population. We talk about the Eight Guiding Principles and how we can all be better models. That builds a sense of pride and engagement in the students, that they’re involved in something bigger than just part of a nursing program.

“One result was, we had a 100% pass rate with our first cohort in the fall. That’s partly because of the grant and the Eight Guiding Principles and having embedded remediation and basic skills as part of the program; the other part was the motivation and engagement of the students. It’s a new program and our students are not only proud but passionate to be part of this. It’s more to them than just becoming a nurse. If we follow these students, in five years they are going to be community leaders. They have a sense of ownership about what we’re doing here.

“When I talk with our students, I tell them I can relate to what they’re going through, that I graduated from this program, an older student, starting at 30, graduated at 35. I want them to know that no matter when you start or where you start from, you can do anything. This grant has impacted the students and me as well on a personal level, and given us all a sense of accomplishment.”

Jennifer Adams, nursing faculty, Fresno City College (at right): “It’s a new program and our students are not only proud, but passionate to be part of this. It’s more to them than just becoming a nurse. They are going to be community leaders.”

Four Central Valley community colleges are part of the Healthcare Team under the C6 Grant: Fresno City, Merced, Bakersfield, and West Hills (below).
“In the process of closing the gap, we’ve broken barriers,” she said. “The whole conversation has shifted between the K-12s and the colleges; now there’s a good understanding of each other’s problems. The blame game has diminished.”

-- Elaine Cash

Closing the Gap:
Elaine Cash Sees Room for Optimism as High School-College Dialog Undergoes a Paradigm Shift

For years there’s been a perceived gap between what California high school students are taught and what their tests showed when they enrolled at one of the state’s 112 community colleges. Assessment tests at the colleges found only a small percentage of the incoming students were proficient in math and English, courses required for students to get an Associate’s Degree or transfer to a four-year institution. As a result, required remediation could delay graduation and training by a year or more and colleges watched some students drop out because of the lengthy timeline and additional financial burden.

Many school students who failed to test at college level proficiency had left high school believing they were ready for college math and English. College officials assumed high schools were not preparing students well and added more remedial courses. High Schools were teaching to the California Standard Test and assumed colleges needed to revise their assessments.

Two years ago, the State of California got involved. The California Community Colleges Student Success Task Force was formed and told to come up with recommendations to bridge this gap and reform the process. There were many recommendations issued. Number 1 was “to collaborate with K-12 to jointly develop common standards for college and career readiness... (and to) develop and implement common centralized diagnostic assessments.”

This need for common assessments and alignment was also among the Eight Guiding Principles spelled out by the TAACCCT grant that led to the formation of the C6 consortium of Central Valley colleges in 2011. As the lead college, West Hills Community College District went looking for a seasoned K-12 administrator to help fulfill this part of the mission. Chancellor Frank Gornick offered the job to Elaine Cash, who had retired from the Riverdale Unified School District in 2010, where she had been the superintendent for the past nine of her 27 years in education.

“I thought I’d find it just an assessment issue, that it was a testing problem,” said the Closing the Gap Project Director, who is also on the adjunct faculty at Fresno State. “But it was more than that,” she learned when she brought high school and community college faculty and staff to the table for joint workshops and discussions.

“What I found was there was a difference between what the K-12 systems were teaching and what the college was expecting, and we really hadn’t been talking to each other about it.”

High schools, Cash said, were focused on the CST results, by which their schools would be judged, while colleges were focused on remediation because that’s been their historical role.

“We were producing too many students who could pass our test but who could not read expository text, come up with an argument, and find the words in the text to support the argument. We thought we were producing students whose proficiencies would align with college assessments, but often they did not.” The good news is that the K-12 administrators she went to for support on fixing the problem “were all in,” Cash said. “Some of the feeder schools have now changed their policies. Expository writing has become their 12th grade curriculum. We’re training teachers in an expository writing and reading course, designed by college faculty to bridge the gap. We’ll have teachers bring in 30 papers from their students and both high school and community college faculty score them all at once to get agreement on what good writing is at this level.”

Common diagnostic assessments for math will get the same treatment. Cash discovered that students were scoring proficient in Algebra 2 but few of these were considered ready for college in placement tests. As a result, Cash is working with high schools to offer math in the senior year. Currently, Algebra II is offered to juniors; frequently these students take no math at all in the 12th grade. By the time they take the college assessment test, their math skills may have eroded enough that they fail to score at college level.

Cash hopes to create a model for other districts to follow. “In May, we’ll hold a series of Convergences, one each of the Central Valley regions. We will bring superintendents and K-12 principals together with colleges and say, ‘This is what we’ve done to align teaching and assessment in English; now we start with math.’”

She is optimistic about the results. “In the process of closing the gap, we’ve broken barriers,” she said. “The whole conversation has shifted between the K-12s and the colleges; now there’s a good understanding of each other’s problems. The blame game has diminished. As we discovered how far out of alignment we were, the common reaction was, ‘Why don’t we just get aligned?’ Common core standards are becoming the norm. The emphasis now is on getting students ready for college. The level of rigor being implemented now is way up and there is a new emphasis on teaching critical thinking. I am delighted at the progress.”
Area CC Leaders Will Gather for Two-Day Conference on Student Success

Community College leaders from throughout California will convene on April 12-13 in Coalinga for a conference on “The Role of Trustees and CEOs on the Goal of Student Success.”

The gathering at Harris Ranch Inn is a two-day workshop for members of boards of trustees, Chancellors, Superintendent/Presidents, and College Presidents who administer colleges around the state.

West Hills Community College District will host the event, which will focus on the efforts of the C6 (Central California Community Colleges Committed to Change) consortium, which has developed an innovative approach and bold response to the US Department of Labor’s Community College and Career Training grant solicitation.

The event is partially funded by the California Education Policy Fund (CEPF), and is a sponsored project of the Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors and the US Department of Labor.

C6 is comprised of a subset of 13 community colleges from the Central Valley Higher Education Consortium (CVHEC). The two-day workshop will feature Byron and Kay McClenney, two noted educators from the University of Texas at Austin who after long careers in education are now consultants to educational institutions, state higher education systems, state government and professional associations in 47 states and internationally. Both have significant experience leading Student Success programs and initiatives.

The conference officially opens with a Thursday night reception on April 11 at 6 p.m. The full conference gets under way Friday morning at 8:30 and runs through dinner. There’s a 5 p.m. tour of the horse division at Harris Ranch before the group dinner meeting. The conference ends Saturday, April 13, at 1 p.m.

Harris Ranch is conveniently located on Interstate 5 at the intersection with Highway 198.

Conference fee is $150 a person including accommodations and meals. For more information, contact Donna Isaac at West Hills Community College District, 9900 Cody Street, Coalinga, CA 93210, or phone 559.934.2102, or email donnaisaac@whccd.edu.

Call right away to register; space is limited.