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## **Opinion Editorial**

### **Coast Colleges Give More Than They Take**

**By: Mary L. Hornbuckle, Trustee**

The recent report from the Public Policy Institute of California regarding the success rates for community colleges is certainly a wake up call for all of us who work in these institutions. But it doesn't do community colleges in this diverse state, or in this county, justice.

Here in Orange County, our community college students enjoy some of the highest success rates in the state. The colleges within the Coast Community College District are among the state's top performers in awarding certificates and degrees and in transferring students to four-year universities within the county and throughout the state.

Our community colleges are vital to the economic viability of our county and our state, and they are the best deal in town for taxpayers. An economic study conducted last year shows that for every dollar taxpayers invest in Orange County's community colleges, they receive \$3 back in increased productivity and avoided social costs associated with welfare, crime and poor health.

It is true that we struggle to accomplish our multi-faceted mission, but we know that it can be boiled down to one job – ensuring the success of our students.

A part of that job is to provide associate's degrees and transfer-level programs, and we are doing that job very well. Coastline Community College, Golden West College and Orange Coast College award over 3,000 associate's degrees a year. In the past two years, Orange Coast College has transferred more students to California State University schools than any other two-year institution in the state.

Some of our students' successes are not as easily measured, but are equally important to Orange County. Many students come to our campuses to improve or learn new job skills, brush up on basic skills, learn English or study a vocational trade.

Coast community colleges provide training for nurses, police officers, healthcare specialists, diesel engine mechanics and many others who may not require a “traditional” college education. However, the demands of today’s economy mean that almost all workers need some kind of specialized training to land a job that can support a family. These often overlooked programs – which are not always counted in our “success rates” – provide sought after skills that allow students to immediately enter the workforce earning good wages.

California community colleges represent the largest and most efficient educational system in the country. We provide all of these opportunities for less funding per student than any other educational institution.

Recent budget increases have been welcome and necessary to help us provide these services. The increases restored unprecedented mid-year funding cuts levied a few years ago, and we are grateful that our legislators in Sacramento understand the value of community colleges. With their support, and the support of our communities, we are proud to continue to do what we do best – educate more students with less funding than any other public educational institution and contribute more to our local economy than we receive in taxpayer dollars.

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*The Coast Community College District is the ninth largest community college district in the state in credit enrollment, serving 60,000 students each semester. The district is comprised of Coastline Community College headquartered in Fountain Valley, Golden West College in Huntington Beach and Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa.*