



Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Eastern Sierra education collaborative wins state funds to plan K-16 career pathways

Columbia College and a team of school districts, colleges and employer groups in the Eastern Sierra Region of California have been awarded a \$250,000 state planning grant to design a regional K-16 education project that can provide more streamlined, equitable pathways to help local students transition from high school to college or career training and into the workforce.

Columbia College will serve as the lead agency for the one-year planning grant, which was just [announced by the state Department of General Services \(DGS\)](#) as part of its larger \$250 million statewide *Regional K-16 Education Collaborative Grant Program*. Partners in the Eastern Sierra Region will use the planning year to establish their collaborative and to apply together for up to \$18 million in state funds available to this region for a three-year “cradle-to-career” pathway project.

“This is the first step toward a very exciting opportunity for our rural counties,” said Columbia College President Dr. Lena Tran. “We are very honored to serve as the lead for a project that will be designed specifically by and for our rural mountain communities. This planning year gives us a chance to build our collaborative and find what works for our students, our schools and our employers.”

California’s K-16 Program is made possible by a \$250 million appropriation to the Department of General Services in the Budget Act of 2021. The K-16 Program is part of a statewide strategy for strengthening education-to-workforce pathways and ensuring that education, vocational, and workforce programs work in partnership to address the income, racial, and gender inequalities in education and employment.

Joining Columbia College in Eastern Sierra Region effort will be partners from K-12, Post-Secondary and Industry partners in the region. These include University of California, Merced, California State University Stanislaus, the Superintendents of Schools in each participating county, several K-12 districts and workforce investment boards including Mother Lode Job Training.

Additional industry partners will be selected in coming months, once the partners select two to three high priority industry sectors that will be the focus of the project. That selection will be based on a regional assessment and inventory, which will be conducted as one of the first activities of the planning year.

The seven-county Eastern Sierra region includes two distinct geographic regions; a core of four adjacent Mother Lode counties that have a long history of working together (Tuolumne, Calaveras, Amador and Mariposa) and are linked by the Highway 49 corridor, and three rural, remote counties on the Eastern side of the Sierra Nevada Mountain range (Alpine, Inyo and Mono) that are linked by the Highway 395 corridor.

While the geographic region is very large, the small rural communities have a lot in common and are encouraged to see state resources focused on rural solutions.

“We’re looking forward to this opportunity to articulate clear pathways that will lead to living wage jobs for our students in careers that are in high demand in the Mother Lode and Eastern Sierra,” said Sonora High School Superintendent Ed Pelfrey. “We believe this project will provide the extra support and resources we need to meet the goal of all students graduating career and college ready. We also look forward to piloting new programs and learning from each other.”

Partners intend to create a collaborative that can extend beyond the K16 grant funding, and that will continue to provide students with learning experiences and career preparation for local industries and help to grow the Eastern Sierra economy.

UC Merced and the Center for Educational Partnerships (CEP) will be an important partner to this work. In particular, the CEP will be providing the planning team with data and research and needs assessment services. UC Merced and Stanislaus State will also be involved in ensuring that students of this region have the greatest number of postsecondary choices from the widest array of options upon graduation and that they enter the workforce prepared.

“UC Merced is excited about the opportunity this collaborative effort will bring to address equity in education and support the goals of students in the Eastern Sierras,” said Dr. Charles Nies, UC Merced Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs. “Through data analytics, clear pathways, and increased engagement, we are honored to partner with colleagues in this powerful and transformational initiative.”

Links for more information:

[*State DGS Press Release on grant awards*](#)

[*Regional K-16 Education Collaboratives Grant Program*](#)