



# Press Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **New Sierra K-16 Education Collaborative Awarded \$18.1 Million for Education-to-Career Pipelines**

Columbia College and a team of school districts, colleges and employer groups in the Eastern Sierra Region of California have been awarded an \$18.1 million state grant for a regional K-16 education project to provide students with more job and career opportunities by improving access to higher education and workforce training in career pathways for education, health care and computer science and engineering.

Columbia College will serve as the lead agency for the three-year project, “Sierra K16: Workforce Ready, Future Engaged,” which is part of California’s larger \$250 million statewide *Regional K-16 Education Collaborative Grant Program*. Partners in the seven-county Eastern Sierra Region received a planning grant a year ago to establish their collaborative and to plan out a three-year “cradle-to-career” pathway project for the region. Partner schools will work together to build out training and transfer pathways for students in each of the three career areas, with projects that fit into regional employment priorities.

“This is such an exciting opportunity for our rural counties,” said Columbia College President Dr. Lena Tran. “I’m very proud of this accomplishment, and we’re honored to serve as the lead for this very important effort that is by and for our rural mountain communities.

“We have been building our collaborative, have done a lot of research and planning and are eager to move ahead with a variety of projects that will support our students, our schools and our employers. What we’ll be doing is changing lives.”

The grant was one of four regional awards – totaling \$72.5 million – [announced by Governor Gavin Newsom yesterday](#).

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 provide broader access to education and employment opportunities.

Joining Columbia College in Eastern Sierra Region effort are 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, many K-12 districts, and workforce investment boards including Mother Lode Job Training. Additional industry partners include Adventist Health Sonora, MACT Health Board Inc. and Apple Inc.

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 this significant amount of state resources focused on rural solutions.

“Sonora Union High School District is excited we are part of a grant that will infuse funding to open up career opportunities for our students,” said Sonora High School Superintendent Ed Pelfry. “This funding will focus on high-demand fields like healthcare, information technology, and education, ensuring that students in our community can pursue meaningful careers right here at home.

“This investment is not just about dollars; it's about investing in our students' futures and the future of our community.”

Partners are planning for the collaborative to extend beyond the K16 grant funding, so they can continue to provide students with learning experiences and career preparation for local industries and help to grow the Sierra economy.

Dr. Henry Yong, Chancellor of the Yosemite Community College District, congratulated the college and the Sierra K-16 partnership.

“I want to thank our partners for this great opportunity of working together to better serve our communities,” he said. “I hope this successful collaboration will lead to even more opportunities to seeking funding that our communities need in this region.”

YCCD Board President Leslie Beggs echoed Yong’s comments and was pleased with the focus on high demand, good quality careers needed in these rural Sierra counties.

“This program is flexible so that we can consider a variety of approaches that fit our local needs,” Beggs said. “It’s also good to see the focus on partnerships with colleges for students at an early age.

“Bringing young students to our campuses and giving them positive learning experiences can light a fire in them and help them see the value of education from their earliest years. Going to college in the future to gain access to a better career then becomes more of a given and less of a distant pipe-dream.”

Links for more information:

<https://www.gov.ca.gov/2023/11/02/more-jobs-better-careers-california-distributes-72-5-million-to-create-regional-education-to-career-pipelines/>

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