Education Roundup: Program to boost community college transfers, grad rates

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In this file photo, Bakersfield College President Sonya Christian speaks during the school's centennial commencement ceremony. Christian has been a champion of the Guided Pathways program, which launched Wednesday and is touted as a way to increase graduation rates at state community colleges.

A statewide community college program championed by Bakersfield College President Sonya Christian that would streamline the transfer process and boost graduation rates launched Wednesday, officials announced.
The California Guided Pathways project, which is based on a national reform model to increase student success, will be rolled out at 20 of California’s 113 community colleges, including BC.

“Our students are often low-income and first in their family to attend college. By clarifying pathways and providing guidance throughout their education, we can ensure more students complete a degree, transfer to a four-year college, and increase their earning potential,” said Christian, who also chairs the California Guided Pathways Advisory Committee.

The model provides structure to students selecting classes. Counselors would plan course schedules based on whether students want to receive two-year degrees, or transfer to a four-year university, check in on them regularly and create pathways for success.

Students would be assisted from point of entry through employment in a chosen field, according to the Foundation for California Community Colleges, which spearheaded the effort.

Guided Pathways would limit the number of students taking courses not necessary for their goals and move them through the community college system faster, clearing enrollment backlogs that districts have for years faced.

“The Guided Pathway model provides a structured framework for colleges to lead institutional change and improve student success,” said incoming California Community Colleges Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley. “I applaud the colleges and partners who’ve taken an innovative leadership role tailoring a national model to benefit students in California.”

Advocates of the program are hoping for statewide funding for several million dollars. The governor’s budget has not yet been finalized, however H.D. Palmer, the State Department of Finance's deputy director of external affairs, said it’s on Brown’s radar.
“He’s definitely aware of the program and the chancellor’s interest in it,” Palmer said.

Castle STEAM Academy gets $80,000 donation

Castle STEAM Academy, Panama-Buena Vista Union School District’s ambitious project to transform one of southwest Bakersfield’s poorest schools, received $80,000 from Chevron to develop an engineering lab, officials announced.

Chevron’s donation supplements $7 million in School Improvement Grant funding the district received last month from the California Department of Education for the project. When the academy opens next fall, it will become a model for how the district runs new schools, district officials said.

“Chevron has been and continues to be a great partner with Panama-Buena Vista schools and programs like Donors Choose, Project Lead the Way and Fuel Your Schools,” Superintendent Kevin Silberberg said. “With this large investment in our STEAM Academy, Chevron has taken it up a notch.”

The Chevron Engineering Lab will impact 800 students who will engage with equipment designed to open their minds to science, technology, engineering and mathematics. They’ll be exposed to coding, robotics, design and real-world problems designed to promote inquiry and creativity.

Castle also plans to provide STEAM career education through labs. Engineers, programmers, designers and architects, among other professionals, will be invited to work with students and provide them with career advice.

“The experiences provided by the Castle STEAM Academy will plant a seed for lifelong learning,” said Adam Alvidrez, community engagement specialist with Chevron. “Chevron looks forward to seeing the innovation lab in action and is happy to continue to partner in inspiring the next generation of innovators.”
CSUB hosting educators open house Saturday

Cal State Bakersfield’s urban teaching residency program is hosting an open house Saturday showcasing elementary school student projects created with the help of teachers in training.

CSUB’s Teacher Education Department partnered with the Bakersfield City School District this fall to develop the Kern County Urban Teacher Residency Program. That program produces experienced and STEM-knowledgeable educators who are ready for hire after completing the one-year program, university officials said.

The 19 residents spend three days a week as co-instructors in elementary and secondary schools and also teach at CSUB’s IDEA Lab School, which stresses innovation, design and engineering in action.

BCSD fifth-grade students visit the lab once a week to work on projects, which will be displayed during the Saturday open house.

It’s at CSUB’s Education Building from 10 a.m. to 12:45 p.m.