



CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE

PRESS RELEASE

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California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Announces \$6.9 Million Grant to Address Mental Health Needs of Students

Chancellor Jack Scott applauds award, says money will focus on prevention and saving lives

SACRAMENTO, Calif. - California Community Colleges Chancellor Jack Scott today announced that the California Mental Health Services Authority has awarded a \$6.9 million grant to the college system to be used over a three-year period for faculty and staff training on student mental health issues, suicide prevention and peer-to-peer services.

"Our most recent data shows that stress, anxiety and depression are among the top factors that affect student academic performance," said Chancellor Scott, who advocates for the state's 2.6 million students across a 112-college system. "This grant comes at a critical time as students are under even more stress because of economic troubles. Almost 50 percent of students reported feeling very sad, very lonely and hopeless and more than a third reported that they were so depressed it was difficult to function."

Another 8 percent of student respondents reported that they had considered suicide and almost 3 percent had attempted suicide.

The California Community Colleges Student Mental Health Program will provide funding to 12 colleges for training, technical services and peer-to-peer assistance. The program also will result in online training resources that are expected to be available to all community college faculty and staff to help them respond appropriately to students who may exhibit signs of mental distress. A focus on student veterans will be an important program element, and community colleges will collaborate with the California State University and University of California on these projects.

Mary and Victor Ojakian, who lost a son to suicide while he was a college student, applauded the grant. In December 2004, their son, Adam, was a senior at University of California, when he took his own life in his apartment after completing his last final exam that quarter. He was 21. The Ojakians have been tireless advocates since Adam's death for funding on-campus mental health initiatives throughout California's higher education systems.

"We are acutely aware of the difficulties and trauma a family experiences when a loved one dies of suicide. It is our hope that these funds can be used to create a sustainable system of improved understanding and support

for those struggling with a mental health issue. We hope to prevent all of us from losing a loved one to the fatal outcome of these illnesses -- suicide,” said Mary and Vic Ojakian. “Since losing our son to suicide, we have worked toward improved mental health understanding and services in all California universities and colleges. Our son was never diagnosed, but we feel that he experienced a deep depression that went unrecognized and untreated.”

The Foundation for California Community Colleges is the official fiscal sponsor of the grant on behalf of the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office.

Many community college students face a wide range of mental health needs and although some seek services, many do not. Among the students who experience or are at-risk of mental health issues are:

- The significant number of returning veterans who may have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI) and depression as a result of their military and combat experiences;
- Those with no prior mental health history who need help for the first time due to developmental challenges, and/or emotional, educational, economic and social stressors.
- Those who have experienced severe depression and previous suicidal thoughts and/or attempts;
- Those who have never been diagnosed but who may present challenges to the campus community by being disruptive;
- Those with diagnosed psychological disabilities, some of whom receive support from campus Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS) and health services offices; and
- Those who may need help but who do not want to use DSPS or other specialized services because of the stigma that is a significant barrier to seeking help for mental health issues.

The [California Community Colleges](#) is the largest system of higher education in the nation. It is composed of 72 districts and 112 colleges serving 2.6 million students per year. Community colleges supply workforce training, basic skills courses in English and math, and prepare students for transfer to four-year colleges and universities. The Chancellor’s Office provides leadership, advocacy and support under the direction of the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges.

➤ **Editor’s Note: See attached fact sheet on the recent efforts to improve on-campus mental health issues.**

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The Chancellor's Office has made significant progress in providing support for campus efforts to address student mental health issues since the last update to the Board in 2008. Advances include the following:

- The Chancellor's Office actively pursued a unique opportunity afforded by the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) to fund a Mental Health Coordinator position that is supported by Proposition 63 (2004) MHSA funds, though a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Mental Health. As a result, the Chancellor's Office was able to hire a Mental Health Coordinator in 2009 to provide statewide leadership and advocacy, to form a mental health advisory committee, and to actively advocate on behalf of the CCC for funding that ultimately resulted in the recent \$6.9 million grant award.
- The CCC Mental Health Services Advisory Committee was formed in June 2009 and meets quarterly.
- The Chancellor's Office now has a mental health Web page presence that includes resources, information and best practices that are of interest to faculty, staff and students. It can be found at www.cccco.edu/mentalhealth.
- In 2010, the Chancellor's Office successfully partnered with a private company to obtain free online suicide prevention training for faculty and staff during Nov. 2010 as part of a pilot project to assess the interest of this tool for CCC faculty and staff. As a result of the pilot, 153 faculty and staff at 23 colleges were trained in recognizing the signs and symptoms of mental health issues among students.
- Also in 2010, the Chancellor's Office obtained a \$75,000 grant from the Zellerbach Family Foundation to support the development and delivery of faculty and staff training on the mental health needs of student veterans. As a result of this effort, six trainings were held at three Bay Area community colleges and 226 faculty, staff, and other participants took part in the training, which included segments on military cultural competence; specific common disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury and depression; transition issues specific to student veterans; and concrete suggestions to make the campus a more welcoming environment for veterans that supports their academic success. In addition, the grant provided for local resources to be developed and made available to training participants at each college.
- The mental health coordinator actively participated in statewide efforts to direct Proposition 63 funds to support campus-based mental health services. Securing the \$6.9 million California Community Colleges Student Mental Health Program (CCCSMHP) grant was the culmination of those efforts.

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