

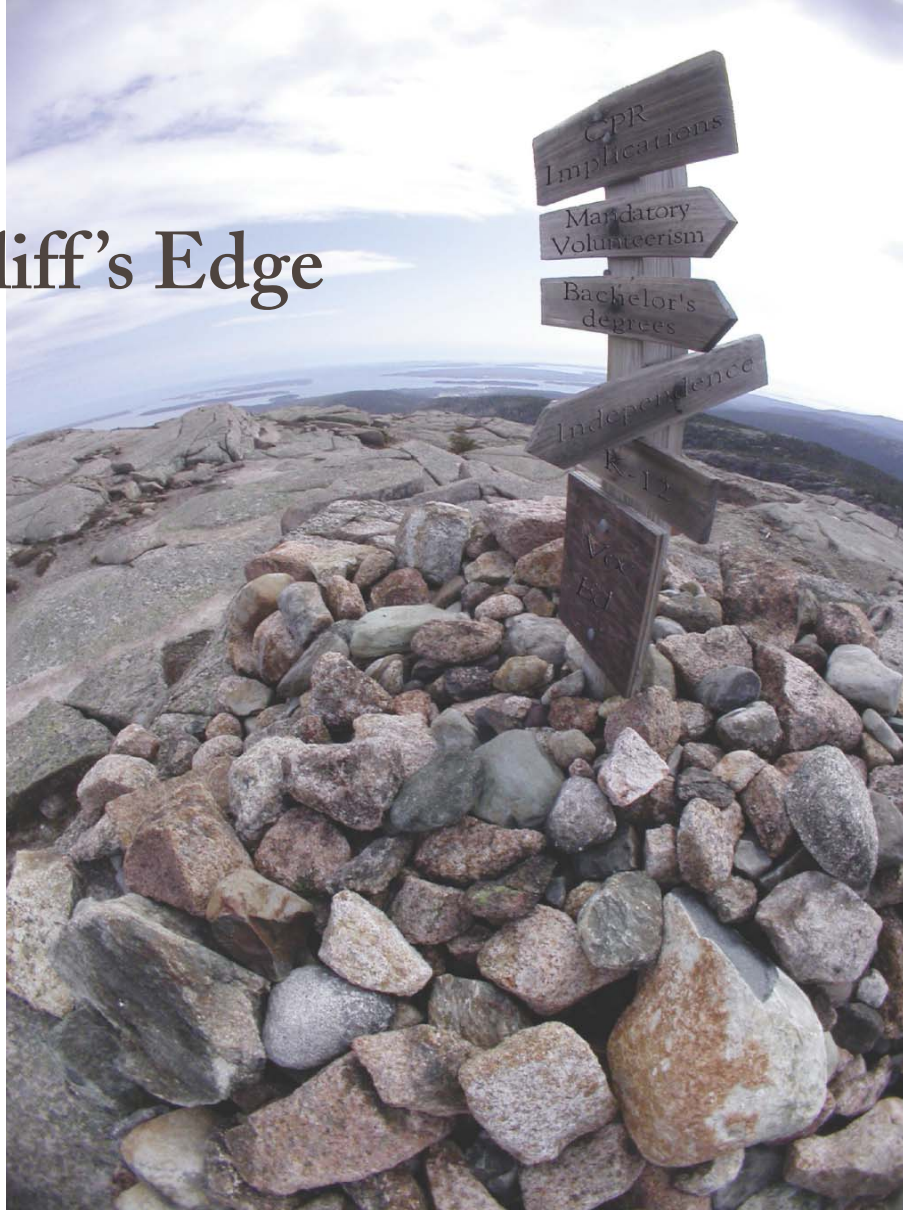
CPR Looms at Cliff's Edge

by Jane Hallinger

California has always been the land of fantasies, the westward trek of dreamers, the last stop where the unusual and imagination flourish.

We have seen many dreams initiated and buried here. Dreams of moving toward achievement - of the reformers, the master builders, and of the controllers. So what does this talk of dreams and fantasy mean to you, a reader? More specifically, you ask, how does this apply to education? My answer, naturally, is that ultimately, everything applies to education. So fantasize with me for a moment on an analogy.

There is a community of hard working people who are still building a dream. They are located on a plateau of Ed mountain. The development of their space hasn't been easy, and the edifice has been under construction for over four decades. Funds weren't always there to meet all needs, but this community learned how to manage effectively and continue to produce a widely sought after product. The people formulated programs and governance structures that could bring pride and equality to all.



Now picture this community complacently nestled on the mountain as an unstable collection of dangerous boulders gathers on the terrain, above. Aware of the danger building above them, the people go about their daily business without worry; they have weathered dangerous threats before, and are confident their triumphant history will secure the wall around them. So the avalanche awaits the demonic moment when it will be unleashed on the hard-working community. And the people of the community below continue, unaware of the necessity of their attention.

Let's move, now, from this fantasy to the arena of reality. As we know, the Master Plan for Higher Education of 1960 designated a plateau for Community Colleges that gave a new strength in the educational hierarchy. We were given a new autonomy over decisions that structured our colleges and their curriculum. We were free from the shackles of a monolithic educational czar, and we were allowed to dream and work

toward realizing our dreams, while gaining a new stature in the eyes of those watching us. Then, when AB1725 was signed, we felt truly emancipated from the “belief” of much of the public that community colleges were merely an enhanced level of K-12. We felt that we were now securely linked as a part of higher education in our transfer programs, and admired for the productivity of our vocational programs. We took on the role of participating more effectively in our own governance on the state level with the Consultation Council, with a new respect gained in our intellectual preparation on issues and our testifying before the Board of

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Governors. We were dreaming the dream...the California dream.

Above this dream, however, lies the imminent fantasy avalanche we thought would never unfetter. The building pressure is increasing steadily, ready to unleash its shattering fury upon us. The California Performance Review (CPR) - the energy behind this avalanche - has proposed combining the Community College Chancellor's Office, the Postsecondary Education Commission, and the California Student Aid Commission, and the Bureau of Private and Postsecondary and Vocational Education. If this proposal were realized, the Board of Governors, our independent public body that discusses and oversees public policy, would be eliminated. Picture the scenario.

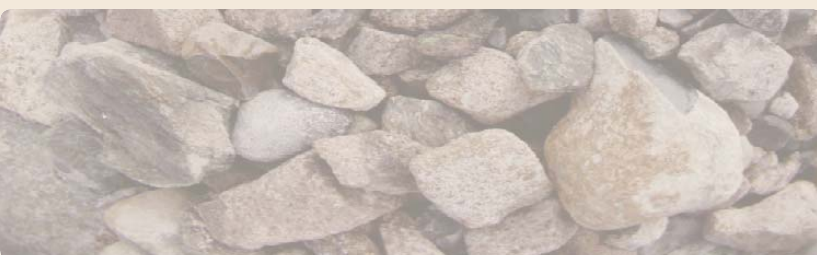
If we feel we have spent several frustrating decades fighting K-12 for percentage points in our legislated (fantasy again) split, what will happen, now, to the community colleges having to battle for support in the larger political arena? Who will decide each year what we will receive? What kind of partisan politics will be involved in the support of our system? Will funding each year be so tenuous each year that our schools can do no reasonable planning for programs, student populations and faculty?

While we can always point to flaws in every system or program, the consultation utilized at both the state and local levels for more than a decade is essential to our “academic” health. We

are a part of higher Ed, we teach critical thinking, and one of the main components of critical thinking is the evaluation of all points of view of

particular issues. This is what we teach, and this is what we have lived through our development and honing of consultation. To destroy this process is to destroy our role in the autonomy of the community college system. Can we envision the world of ‘big brother’ returning (of course, one might say he has never really vacated the premises) - one in which we live under the crumbs and dictates that he dispenses? Start listing the freedoms that the community college system has achieved through our advocacy and hard work, and then envision how these freedoms can be altered or removed – one by one.

If, as suggested by the CPR, the entire 107 community colleges and their nearly two million students were overseen by the governor's office, how can we not be afraid? Remember that the current education advisor, Richard Riordan, has no background in education. Isn't that an anomaly to head the highest-funded division in the state with no academic preparation and apparently little or no understanding of the issues of K-12, let alone the community college system



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which - with the average age of its students at 28 years-old - cannot be equated to lower division education. The governor's appointee controlling the largest community college system in the world is a fantasy that defies all logic.

The scramble for space in our system as well as the universities' is a real dilemma. There is unquestionable need for new campuses, but development time and cost are definite deterrents. So the “easy” solution is to allow selected community colleges to award bachelor's degrees. This is not a new discussion and - on the surface - is an enticing one. I would welcome teaching upper division classes in literature, but if I do, other students will be displaced. Already we are asked to absorb the student transfer population that has been excluded from the university for their freshman and sophomore years. We also have a finite space and can expand no more readily than the university system. It is even greater an issue for the community colleges due to our multiple roles and complex mission. Do we discard basic skill instruction to create space for upper division instruction? Do we further deplete vocational education and, if we do, how will the next generation of workers be trained? By expensive proprietary schools? We know that most of our students cannot afford that avenue without government loans, which become a drain on the income of the newly placed worker. Just keep adding it up, and you'll find two and two go way beyond four.

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groups that have come up with extensive plans to remedy the problems of the “ailing” community colleges, to remold them, and make them more efficient. Some ideas have been accepted and incorporated into the system. Many of them produced sustained ridicule and quickly disappeared like the air escaping from a balloon. Today's skeptics can say, “so be it” and await the deflation of the CPR recommendations; history is certainly an indicator that that can happen. Part of what we teach in critical thinking in the “prized open arena of discourse” whereby we provide room for all views, including the skeptics, who may point to the many times in the past when the boulders seemed ready to dislodge and fall upon us, and they didn't. I would hope that, once more, our community of hard workers would be allowed to flourish and evade the threat. But salvation won't happen by osmosis; it will happen only if we evaluate each suggestion critically, and present a clear and logical case for our community college systems local and state autonomy. However, I contend that we can't afford to ignore any suggestion - however far-fetched - because once aired, an idea is placed in the arena of discussion. There is no fantasy in the charge that we all should be a part of discussion in our colleges and not hope that (once again) Sacramento advocates will take care of our niche on the Ed mountain. ■



California Performance Review: What's Behind the Noise?

by Jonathan Lightman

Word has spread quickly that there's a proposal to return the governance of community colleges to the K-12 system. No major player in the community college system has embraced this proposal, and some, like FACCC, are vigorously objecting to it (see Jane Hallinger's article on page 19).

Who thought of this, who's behind it, what other proposals are floating around which would affect community colleges, and what does it take to turn them into law? These questions require examination.

Source of the Proposals

During the recall campaign of former Governor Gray Davis, Arnold Schwarzenegger capitalized upon public perception that not much was happening in Sacramento. He entered office with a theme for his new administration: "action, action, action."

Part of that action, he declared to the Legislature in last January's State of the State address, would be about "blowing up boxes" – meaning that he sought a radical restructuring of state sponsored and state funded services. In purely technical terms, Schwarzenegger planned to trigger Government Code Section 12080.1, which provides the governor authority to "examine the organization of [state] agencies" in an effort to improve efficiency and reduce expenses.

By executive order, Schwarzenegger established the California Performance Review (CPR) whose mandate was to "comprehensively examine the way state government works, and issue a report with recommendations for reform." Guided by Texas Deputy Comptroller Billy Hamilton, the CPR recruited over 250 state employees to assist in this endeavor.

On August 3, the CPR released its report containing a reorganization of state entities with over 1,200 individual recommendations for changes in 278 separate issue areas. It also adopted another 239 proposals released by the Corrections Independent Review Panel. The major recommendations call for the elimination of 117 independent boards and commission, with the creation of 11 mega departments.

The push to consolidate reverses decades of efforts to make government more accessible to its citizens by decentralizing functions.

While CPR representatives claim that the changes will save taxpayers \$32 billion over five years, the Legislative Analyst's Office claims that "the potential savings are beyond what is reasonably achievable."

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Who's Behind It?

The CPR boldly defends its process. “Absolutely not,” is the CPR’s response to the allegation that the report was assembled in secret. According to CPR staff, there were meetings with over 1,800 people, “citizens, businesses, unions, trade associations – anyone who had an idea.”

The truth is a bit more complicated and far more insidious.

There was an extreme aura of secrecy to the CPR’s work, and no one truly knows who’s responsible for what section. While the report provides an acknowledgement section for everyone who contributed an idea, it doesn’t provide a single insight as to who wrote what section.

This emphasis on secrecy has led to speculation that the CPR is less about government reorganization, than a giveaway to special interests that can’t get the Legislature to approve their agendas. LA Times columnist Michael Hiltzik recently exposed one such recommendation as a boon to the aviation industry, potentially resulting in millions of dollars in decreased tax revenue.

While Governor Schwarzenegger acknowledged that “special interests will be screaming” about the CPR’s recommendations, he attributes this to the fact that “their agenda is not the people’s agenda.” Hiltzik, on the other hand, notes that “[E]ach innocuous provision that turns out to be a possible Trojan horse for a special interest diminishes the reorganization plan a little bit more. Find enough of these, and Californians may simply throw up their hands and conclude that the whole package is just another government fraud.”

For community colleges, it’s even more difficult to determine who’s behind the proposals. One can only speculate where there are individuals – either in or outside of our system – who would like to run the community colleges without being hassled by an independent board or participatory governance. Without any level of transparency from the CPR, we’ll never know who wrote the major sections for community colleges.

Other Proposals Affecting Community

Aside from the significant governance changes, the CPR makes other substantial recommendations affecting community colleges, a few of them explained here.

Under the proposal, vocational education faculty would be exempt from regulations governing the faculty obligation number for full-time hiring. The CPR’s rationale for this recommendation is to allow colleges the flexibility to hire working professionals to teach part-time.

Those of us in the system know that this happens already. According to the Chancellor’s Office, the full- to part-time ratio for vocational education faculty teaching credit classroom instruction is a measly 55 percent. Exempting the vocational faculty from full-time hiring would result in an overall diminution of full-time faculty, erosion of the functions of academic departments, and further impairment of student access to instructors.

The report also envisions the authority of select community colleges to provide bachelor’s degrees. This would be tried on a pilot basis as a means of reaching out to underserved areas of the state in high demand fields. Although a major expansion of the community colleges’ mission, the report doesn’t suggest a differential funding rate, or a means by which to handle increased costs due to enhanced accreditation standards.

Despite the obvious oxymoron, the CPR recommends “mandatory volunteerism” of all students attending a California public higher education institution leading to a degree. While no one disputes the value of service learning, it’s quite another thing to require public service outside the curriculum for the express purpose of

building "students' sense of membership within California's global society." According to LA Times columnist George Skelton, the proposal "[r]eads like a mix of Soviet bloc big-brotherism, Jesuit philosophy and Heritage Foundation ramblings."

It's been widely reported that this proposal emanates from First Lady Maria Shriver, a Georgetown University alumna. In fact, it may make a lot of sense to impose it on undergraduate students in elite private institutions. But it's axiomatic that community college students are different. As Skelton writes, "Look, taxpayers don't 'subsidize' students as much as they invest in California's own future by providing affordable educations that develop a skilled, innovative workforce. It's one of the things that made California great."

What's Next?

The CPR has been vetted in a series of hearings throughout the state, conducted by an independent commission appointed by the governor. The commissioners are different from those who put together the report, although it's clear in some cases, that the agendas are similar.

FACCC representatives attended several of the hearings, and each time, we were struck by what little attention was devoted to public testimony. Obviously, those desiring to criticize are deemed not to have the public's interest in mind.

The Commission will be commenting on the report to the governor, who will decide which proposals he likes and which ones he doesn't. Those that the governor adopts will be divided into two categories - those which can be adopted by executive order, and those which need legislative (or constitutional) change.

This is where it gets tricky, because we have no indication as to how items will be brought to the Legislature or to the people. Initially, it was thought that all 1,200 recommendations would be submitted in the form of a GRP - "Governor's Reorganization Plan," which follows a path markedly different than a normal bill. It proceeds to the Little Hoover Commission for review, and automatically becomes law within 60 days of introduction unless either House of the Legislature, by majority votes, expresses opposition.

Since no one expects the Democratic controlled Legislature to embrace the CPR through a GRP process, it's likely that individual components will be broken up into various bills. Unfortunately, the governor can use his leverage in the budget process to extract concessions from the Legislature on some of the controversial items.

Upon its release, FACCC was knocking on legislators' doors explaining its impact on community colleges. As usual, FACCC was the first. And FACCC will not rest as long as these proposals continue to surface. FACCC is not interested in expediency or compromise, but results which enhance community colleges, not impair them. Your participation in this effort through grass-roots lobbying and media outreach is fundamental. ■

Given the enormity of the CPR's report (over 2,000 pages), it's best to view it online. Visit www.faccc.org today to view the CPR, and related analyses and articles.