

Opinion | Commentary

## BUILDING SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

BY CINDY L. MILES

By the typical measurements of community colleges, Dan Baker would be considered a failure.

Over the past 12 years, he's taken six classes at Cuyamaca College, but he isn't working toward a degree or planning to transfer to a university.

Actually, Baker is a true success story. He's a utility crew supervisor at the Helix Water District, moving up in the ranks at the East County agency after taking classes in water and wastewater technology to get the training and background he needed to earn his required certifications.

He's now taking a backflow tester training course at Cuyamaca College to further sharpen his skills, and he has only praise for the program.

"The beauty of having that class is it's taught by people who work in the industry," Baker said. "The knowledge is there, and they know exactly what you're talking about when you have a question."

Baker and others like him who are taking community college classes to improve their skills might not be the image that comes to mind when you think about a typical community college student. However, in addition to offering associate degrees and preparing students for university transfer, community colleges also play a critical role in educating and training those in the workforce, helping them learn new skills to make them more knowledgeable in their jobs — and often leading to more pay.

Until now, the students who just took a couple of career technical classes to improve their skills weren't included in the metrics used in the accountability measures for community colleges. Because they didn't earn a certificate or degree, their achievement didn't count when measuring the success of a community college.

That will be changing soon, when a new measure for "skills builders" will be included in the Student Success Scorecards for all of California's 113 community colleges. The score cards, which now show data on how many students complete their courses and persist in their education, will also include information that highlights our many students looking to learn more so they can be better workers.

*Those who take career technical education courses to add to their job skills experience a median wage increase of 13.6 percent.*

The results are impressive. The data from about 86,000 California students showed that those who take career technical education courses to add to their job skills experience a median wage increase of 13.6 percent, or about \$4,300. Statewide, the total wage gains for 2013-14 were \$498 million, which benefits not only the students and their families but the overall California economy.

Some of the fields that showed significant earnings increases include administration of justice at a 7.7 percent wage gain; child development education at 15.7 percent; and accounting at 20.8 percent.

At Grossmont and Cuyamaca colleges, the wage increases were particularly notable in several fields, including:

- Cuyamaca College's Water and Wastewater Technology program, where median wages rose from \$44,191 to \$49,397 — an 11.8 percent increase — for students in those classes.
- Grossmont College's Medical Office Technology program, where students saw a whopping 134.5 percent increase in median wages, from \$9,673 to \$22,684.
- Grossmont College's Business and Commerce program, with a 62.7 percent increase from \$14,704 to \$23,928 in median wages.
- And Cuyamaca College's Real Estate program, where median wages rose from \$37,519 to \$47,470, a 26.5 percent increase.

Grossmont and Cuyamaca colleges, and the other community colleges in our area, serve many needs for our region. We are proud to have trained thousands of students so they can improve their lives and better serve their employers and the community.

---

*Miles, Ph.D., is chancellor of the Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District.*