



COMMUNITY COLLEGES

# New Leader, New Vision for California Community Colleges

By *Eric Kelderman* | JULY 19, 2016

**T**he California Community Colleges system on Monday named one of its alumni to lead its 113 campuses.

Eloy Ortiz Oakley, who has served as president of the Long Beach Community College District since 2007, will be the next chancellor of the system, which serves more than two million students. He is scheduled to take office in December.

The system's Board of Governors announced his selection before the beginning of its regular meeting in



Eloy Ortiz Oakley, who earned his first degree at one of the system's colleges, will take charge of the 113-campus system in December.

**Sacramento**, just three months after his previous chancellor, Brice W. Harris, retired.

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Mr. Oakley earned his first college degree from one of the system's institutions, Golden West College, in Huntington Beach, after serving four years in the U.S. Army. "Golden West opened a door for me," said Mr. Oakley, who went on to earn a bachelor's degree and an M.B.A. at the University of California at Irvine.

His appointment sets a new tone for both the position and the direction of the system. Mr. Harris, who is 67, and his predecessor, Jack Scott, who was 78 when he stepped down, in 2012, each became chancellor at the end of their careers and led the system for less than five years.

Mr. Oakley has been a campus president for nine years and is just 51 years old. "I've still got kids in college," he said in an interview with *The Chronicle*, "so retirement isn't even a thought."

"The Board of Governors publicly made a commitment to recruit someone who wanted to make this an important part of their career," Mr. Oakley said. "The system needs the perspective of a long-term view."

Mr. Oakley said the system has a responsibility to make sure that its campuses are serving minority students. "We really must be intentional and unrelenting in meeting the needs of all our students," he said, and in particular those who have been historically left behind.

Mr. Oakley has gained national attention for his efforts to improve the outcomes of minority students in his own district, helping to create the Long Beach College Promise, a partnership with the city and California State University at Long Beach to encourage more of the region's students to complete a college credential. The program begins encouraging elementary-

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school students to pursue a college degree, provides a free year of tuition at Long Beach City College for high-school graduates, and guarantees of transfer to Long Beach State for students who meet academic requirements.

In accepting his new position, Mr. Oakley said such collaboration across education systems and with local and state governments will be a key focus of his efforts as chancellor, in order to better prepare students for California's future work-force needs.

The major challenges for achieving that goal, Mr. Oakley said, come from both inside and outside the system, including how the state pays for higher education and the regulations of the system.

The public and state lawmakers need to "believe in the investment they're making" in the community colleges, Mr. Oakley said. At the same time, the state's rules for distributing public money have to be adjusted to account for the higher costs of some career and technical programs, he said. Right now, for example, nursing programs are paid for at the same rate as English programs, he said.

The colleges also have to let go of some of the "traditions and regulations" that have accumulated over time, such as the conventional academic calendar that delivers most courses during two long semesters, he said. While many of those conventions were developed for good reasons, now is the time to take a step back and see how they help or impede students, he said.

The colleges should be more "nimble," he said, in meeting the state's work-force needs — for instance, by streamlining the process to approve new curricula for some career programs. That process now can take up to 18

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**mo** months, Mr. Oakley said. But faculty members should be able to develop programs more quickly in order to meet the needs of the state's booming technology sector.

"Our colleges," he said, "were not designed to move that quickly."

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