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ADVANCING MENTAL HEALTH POLICY & INSPIRING LEADERSHIP

July 21, 2017

Board of Governors  
Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley  
California Community Colleges  
1102 Q Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95811

Dear Members of the California Community Colleges Board of Governors and Chancellor Oakley,

The Steinberg Institute, founded by Sacramento Mayor and former State Senate President pro Tempore Darrell Steinberg, is a leading non-profit public policy institute that advances effective mental health public policymaking. We are pleased to lend our support for the report, *Vision for Success*, the strategic vision for the California Community Colleges.

As the *Vision* notes, the California Community Colleges are indispensable to California's workforce, economy and overall welfare, and I commend the Chancellor and the Board for seeking to understand what the state needs from this system—the largest system of higher education in the world.

The Steinberg Institute is particularly interested in the growing need for access to mental health services at California's institutions of higher education. As many as one in three undergraduates nationwide experience a mental health problem, yet only a fraction of those students receive treatment. Depression is a leading factor in student drop-out rates and can lead to homelessness and suicide. In California, suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students. Tragically, this results in nearly 200 deaths by suicide by California public college students each year. Furthermore, studies indicate that 25 percent of undergraduate students reported seriously considering suicide, while 10 percent have attempted suicide.

As noted in the *Vision* report, community colleges can and should take steps to address students' personal and life challenges in ways that support their in-class learning. For example, community colleges can create better linkages with county mental health agencies to help

eligible students access resources such as health care and mental health services. Considering the growing number of students seeking counseling, there is even more need to support effective services, such as peer-to-peer programs, and community and intra-campus engagement. We applaud the *Vision* report for including these considerations and recommending that community colleges identify systematic ways to recognize the needs of adult learners and connect them with the right services both on and off campus.

Californians care deeply about the future of their community colleges, and the goals and principles recommended in the *Vision* are an important commitment to our State, its residents, and to our collective future. We look forward to partnering with the community colleges on efforts to increase access to mental health services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M. Merritt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Maggie Merritt  
Executive Director  
Steinberg Institute