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Office of the President

TO MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE:

DISCUSSION ITEM

For Meeting of November 18, 2026

INNOVATIONS IN K-12 EDUCATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across California, high schools and networks are changing both how students learn and how they show what they have learned. These innovations in instruction and assessment are designed to combine rigorous academic preparation with real-world experience, rather than placing students on separate college and career tracks.

This item will help the Regents consider what these innovations show about engagement, rigor, and readiness. It features two approaches to high school redesign: High Tech High, a network of public charter schools in San Diego County, and Linked Learning, an approach to high school in which students take college-preparatory academics, including A–G courses, together with technical coursework, work-based learning, and student supports, organized around an industry theme. The CEO of High Tech High will describe how its schools design instruction and assessment and what outcomes students achieve, including completion of the A–G courses required for UC admission. The president of the Linked Learning Alliance will describe the Linked Learning model and share what educators, students, district and state leaders, and partners said about college and career readiness at a UC Regents listening session held in conjunction with the Alliance's annual conference in October 2026.

BACKGROUND

Earlier discussions in this series examined the history and role of the A–G requirements and how changes in technology and work are reshaping what students will need. This discussion turns to schools themselves: what high schools are doing differently to prepare students, how they measure that preparation, and what results those approaches produce.

Many California high schools organize learning in ways that have changed little in a century: subjects taught separately, in short class periods, and teachers see large numbers of students each day. Research on adolescent development describes the high school years as a period of significant growth in reasoning, identity, and purpose. That research finds that students learn more when they see meaning in their work, have strong relationships with adults, and apply what they learn to real problems.

Assessment practices are also changing. Most high schools measure readiness through course grades, credits earned, and standardized tests. Some schools, networks, and states also use performance assessments, such as exhibitions, portfolios, and oral defenses, in which students apply knowledge to complex tasks and are evaluated against shared criteria. As artificial intelligence makes a finished assignment less reliable evidence of what a student knows, the question of how students demonstrate learning is gaining importance.

California has made substantial public investments in models built on these principles, including the Golden State Pathways Program, the California Community Schools Partnership Program, expanded dual enrollment, and the Secondary School Redesign Pilot. Pathway and redesign models are generally built so that students complete A–G courses alongside career-connected learning. How these models are structured, and how well they work, therefore matters both for UC and for preparation across California's education system.

As part of this learning process, listening sessions are being held across the state to gather perspectives on college and career readiness from educators, students, families, employers, and community partners. This discussion includes findings from one of the first completed sessions.

The presentations will examine two approaches to high school redesign from different vantage points. The first is an in-depth look at how one network of secondary schools, High Tech High, designs instruction and assessment. The second is a brief overview of the Linked Learning model and what educators, students, and partners in Linked Learning pathways said at a recent UC Regents listening session. Together they will address questions such as what these models show about how student engagement relates to academic rigor and student outcomes; what results models that integrate academic and career-connected learning produce for students' preparation for college and work; what forms of assessment can show whether students are ready, alongside grades, course completion, and test scores; how these approaches serve all students, including those with learning differences and those from historically underserved communities; and what educators, students, education leaders, and workforce and community partners identify as the experiences, supports, and measures that best prepare students for college and career.

The discussion will also consider the conditions these models require, including time in the school day, teacher collaboration and professional learning, and partnerships with employers, colleges, and communities.

Deeper Learning by Design: High Tech High

Diana Cornejo-Sanchez is Chief Executive Officer of High Tech High (HTH), a network of 16 public charter schools serving approximately 6,350 students in grades TK–12 in San Diego County. HTH opened in 2000 as a single high school founded by a coalition of San Diego civic leaders, business leaders, and educators, and now also operates the HTH Graduate School of Education. Ms. Cornejo-Sanchez became CEO in 2025 after serving as interim CEO. She has held leadership roles at HTH since 2018, including director of the Teacher Center and director of Instructional Leadership and Development, and has worked in project-based learning with students and educators for more than 16 years.

She will describe how HTH organizes instruction around four design principles: equity, personalization, authentic work, and collaborative design. Her remarks will address detracked, honors-level classrooms open to all students; small learning environments with advisory cohorts; and interdisciplinary projects that pair the humanities with science and mathematics around open-ended questions. She will connect this approach to research on adolescent development showing that reflecting on the broader meaning of what they learn supports young people's long-term growth.

She will describe how HTH assesses learning through practices such as public exhibitions of student work for community members and experts; student-led conferences, in which students analyze their own progress; and presentations of learning, in which students formally defend their growth and readiness to advance. She will also discuss the role of peer critique, repeated revision, and feedback from professionals in the field, and HTH's view of standardized tests as limited measures of skills such as reflection, synthesis, and independent learning.

She will discuss the operating conditions the model requires, including block scheduling, daily common planning time for teachers, and adult learning that mirrors the learning expected of students. She will also share student outcomes, such as A–G completion and college application and acceptance rates, and students' own perspectives.

Voices from the Field: Linked Learning Listening Session

Anne Stanton is President of the Linked Learning Alliance, a statewide coalition of education, industry, and community organizations that supports more than 600 Linked Learning pathways in more than 80 California school districts. She was the principal architect of the Linked Learning approach and a founding member of the Alliance, and has led the Alliance since 2018. She previously served as Program Director for Youth at The James Irvine Foundation, which launched the California Linked Learning District Initiative.

She will provide a brief overview of the Linked Learning model, which was founded to replace separate college and career tracks with a single high school experience that prepares students for both. Linked Learning pathways combine college-preparatory academics, including A–G courses; a sequence of technical courses; work-based learning; and integrated student supports, all organized around an industry theme. The overview will touch on student engagement as a precondition for rigor and on outcome data from pathways across the state, including findings from a multiyear independent evaluation.

Most of her remarks will focus on findings from the UC Regents college and career readiness listening session held on October 22, 2026, in conjunction with the Alliance's annual convening in Palm Springs. The session had two parts. In conference-style discussions, more than 100 teachers, counselors, district and network leaders, state and local education leaders, and workforce and community partners considered five topics: what readiness is; effective instructional approaches; how a changing world is reshaping readiness; A–G in practice; and the adequacy of current readiness indicators. Participants also visited Magnolia Heights Middle School and Arroyo Valley High School in San Bernardino City Unified School District. Students led nearly all of the visit, presenting their own learning and describing their experiences in their

pathways. Ms. Stanton will share high-level themes that emerged across both parts of the session.