

# Accreditation Workgroup II

HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION ALIGNMENT:  
A VISION FOR THE WESTERN REGION

**SUMMARY REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS**  
**SEPTEMBER 2017**

# Accreditation Workgroup II

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## PURSUIT OF IMPROVEMENT & ALIGNMENT

Over the last decade, the **California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO)**, **Board of Governors (BOG)**, and individual community colleges and districts have expressed increasingly serious concerns regarding the state of accreditation under its present agency, the **Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC)**.<sup>1</sup> Overall, the concerns stemmed from three key sources:

- (1) Inordinately high quantity and frequency of sanctions issued by ACCJC compared to other regional accreditors
- (2) Frustrations with the tone, transparency, and consistency of decisions and communications from the accreditor
- (3) Growing demands on higher education with calls for greater responsiveness and alignment between sectors

To address the mounting dissatisfaction with the present system of accreditation in the Western region, two workgroups were formed in March 2016 by the **Chief Executive Officers of the California Community Colleges (CEOCCC)** and confirmed by the BOG:

**Workgroup I**, to address immediate **improvements** in the structure and functioning of ACCJC to address long-standing concerns of its members, and

**Workgroup II**, to pursue the long-range goal of identifying a model for regional accreditation that **aligns** all segments of higher education in the Western region.

Both groups were charged with reporting back to the CEOCCC and BOG beginning July 2016.

**This report presents the final summary of the background, activities, findings, and recommendations of Workgroup II.**

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<sup>1</sup> The Community College League of California (CCLC) and the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) have jointly collected a number of documents tracing the history, documentation, and evolution of these concerns, which are posted on the CCLC website under [Accreditation Resources](#), including the *CCCCEO Accreditation Reform Timeline 2009-2017*, a chronology of activities leading to the formation of the two CEO Workgroups and links to publications and reports (e.g., CCCCCO Accreditation Taskforce reports, BOG resolutions pertaining to accreditation matters), updates from the CEOCCC Board chair, and news/media reports.

## WORKGROUP II MEMBERSHIP

The membership of Workgroup II (WG II) reflects accreditation as a regional activity, with representatives from **public and private two-year colleges in the Western region**, encompassing California, Hawai'i, and the Western Pacific islands, as well as the **presidents and board chairs of ACCJC and WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC)**.

### *California Community Colleges*

Cindy Miles, Chancellor, Grossmont-Cuyamaca CCD; Convener  
Lori Adrian, President, Coastline CC (Coast CCD)  
Sandra Caldwell, President, Reedley College (State Center CCD)  
Constance Carroll, Chancellor, San Diego CCD  
Debbie DiThomas, Superintendent/President, Barstow CC  
Ron Kraft, Superintendent/President, Napa CCD  
Willard Lewallen, Superintendent/President, Hartnell CCD;  
ACCJC Commissioner  
Dena Maloney, Superintendent/President, El Camino CCD  
Cheryl Marshall, Chancellor, North Orange County CCD  
Brian Murphy, President, De Anza College (Foothill-De Anza CCD)  
Bill Scroggins, President/CEO, Mt. San Antonio CCD  
Susan Sperling, President, Chabot College (Chabot-Las Positas CCD)  
Joe Wyse, Superintendent/President, Shasta-Tehama-Trinity CCD

### *Western Pacific Community Colleges*

Lui Hokoana, Chancellor, Maui College, University of Hawai'i  
Melinda Nish, Executive Advisor, College of the Marshall Islands<sup>2</sup>

### *Private Colleges with membership in ACCJC*

Jeff Akens, Retired President (Carrington College)

### *WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC)*

Mary Ellen Petrisko, WSCUC President  
William Ladusaw, Professor of Linguistics, UCSC; WSCUC Board Chair

### *Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC)*

Raul Rodriguez, Chancellor, Rancho Santiago CCD;  
ACCJC Board Chair  
Richard Winn, ACCJC Interim President<sup>2</sup>

### *Ex-officio/Resource Members*

Brian King, Chancellor, Los Rios CCD; CCCCEO Board President  
Jamiene Studley, National Policy Advisor, Former Deputy Under Secretary, National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) Chair, US Department of Education  
Mark Butland, Professor, Austin CCD, Graduate Intern, Roueche Graduate Center, National American University  
Myra Lomahan, Grossmont-Cuyamaca CCD, Executive Assistant; WG II Recorder

*CCD = Community College District*

Among the WG II members, more than half have worked with multiple regional accreditors, four have served as commissioners, five have led institutions through initial accreditation, and all have served on peer review teams and led college accreditation efforts.

## RECOMMENDATION OF WORKGROUP II

Workgroup II conducted extensive research, review of options, and consultation beginning May 2016. This report outlines the background, options considered, and rationale that lead to the group's **consensus that the long-term needs of all higher education students, institutions, and communities in the Western region would best be served by affiliation with a single accreditor**. This conclusion responds to the growing standardization of federal accountability requirements, increasingly blurred lines between types of institutions (e.g., community colleges offering baccalaureates, universities offering associate degrees), and our common higher education student population, all of which call for closer alignment and quality evaluation relationships between higher education sectors. In summary, **Workgroup II proposes that the Western region adopt the same model as all other accrediting regions in the U.S.**

*NOTE: Workgroup II makes this recommendation with the understanding that implementing such a change would call for multiple decision points and a long-term structured transition plan, should all parties agree on this goal. Implications and pathways for such decisions are explored in later sections of this report.*

## BACKGROUND

The review and planning effort arose from concerns largely expressed by public community colleges in California about issues of **transparency, collegiality, and consistency**. Workgroup II noted these concerns, which were being addressed in terms of short-term improvement by Workgroup I, and focused its attention on long-range accreditation needs in the face of major changes facing higher education. Workgroup II also noted that community colleges in California in recent years have faced unique state policy and funding changes calling for new organizational approaches, with implications for accreditation. Thus, the initial attention of this effort was devoted to California.

California's two-year colleges grew out of the K-12 adult education system; as a result, critics have commonly characterized them as an extension of high school rather than true higher education entities. The system of California Community Colleges (CCCs) was formed and defined as part of the California Master Plan for Higher Education, but the CCC system has remained fiscally joined in statute with K-12 in state funding and other considerations. The current accreditation structure reinforces the notion that community colleges are separate and apart from higher education. Over the past decade, the focus on student success and building durable, smooth pathways to certificates and degrees has amplified the role of the system as a provider for regional higher education.

The CCCs are one of three sectors of public higher education in California, along with the **University of California (UC)** and the **California State University (CSU)**, serving the rising needs of rapidly changing student populations and public demands. Over half of all California undergraduates (2.1 million students) attend one of the state's **114 public community colleges**. With successful intersegmental articulation and curriculum programs such as the *Course Identifier System (C-ID)* and *Associate Degrees for Transfer* created by AB 1440 (Padilla, 2010), and with the establishment of **community college bachelor's degrees** through SB 850 (Block, 2014), the lines between the curricula, services, and needs of two- and four-year colleges in the state are increasingly blurred.

These changes call for new approaches and strengthened linkages across higher education sectors to respond to changing student demographics, volatility of enrollments and funding, increasing social and economic needs for higher education, and growing public accountability demands. Workgroup II finds that higher education institutions in other U.S. regions are better positioned to address these challenges collectively because their community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities are all accredited by a single, comprehensive accreditation commission. The Western region's bifurcated accreditation structure inherently impedes aligned, integrated approaches to improvement and can inhibit long-term interests of institutions and students in both sectors of higher education.

Although the **12 public community colleges in Hawai'i and the Western Pacific** are organized differently from CCCs, they share many of the same challenges, including enrollment and fiscal volatility, accountability demands, and blurred lines between higher education sectors. In addition, structural distinctions among these institutions call for stronger alignment across higher education. The **seven Hawai'i community colleges** are part of the University of Hawai'i System (UHS) governed by a single Board of Regents, but each is separately accredited. All except Maui College (which offers three applied baccalaureate degrees and is accredited by WSCUC) are accredited by ACCJC. Other community colleges in the Western Pacific (e.g., **American Samoa Community College, Guam Community College, College of the Marshall Islands, Northern Marianas College, Palau Community College, and College of Micronesia-FSM**) vary in governance structure, in keeping with the independent nation or U.S. territories they serve. Northern Marianas College was initially accredited by ACCJC, but changed its accreditor to WSCUC in 2014 as it developed a second bachelor's degree. Interestingly, Maui and Northern Marianas Colleges were for a time accredited by both ACCJC (for associate degrees) and WSCUC (for bachelor's degrees). Both retain their identities as community colleges and are accredited by WSCUC.

## ACCREDITATION & HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

Workgroup II engaged national accreditation experts, conducted independent research, and reviewed comparative models of regional accreditation to explore differences in structures and cultures, in addition to studying the drivers of change in higher education accreditation in the United States.

### Comparing Structure, Function, and Culture of Regional Accreditors

Among the **six accrediting regions**, the Western region is unique in its bifurcated approach to higher education accreditation. The other five regions employ a single accreditation structure that includes all segments of higher education—community colleges, as well as four-year colleges and universities—within the same accrediting commission. This organizational split between WSCUC and ACCJC is atypical of all other parts of the country, despite their member’s similarities in accountability and service demands to that of other national higher education providers.

The regional higher education accrediting commissions are as follows:<sup>3</sup>

- **Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)**  
*523 institutions, 5 states, DC, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands*
- **New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (NEASC-CIHE)**  
*243 institutions, 6 states*
- **Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU)**  
*161 institutions, 7 states*
- **Higher Learning Commission (HLC)**  
*999 institutions, 19 states*
- **Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)**  
*799 institutions, 11 states*
- **WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC)**  
*177 institutions, 2 states, Pacific region*
- **Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges-Western Association of Colleges and Schools (ACCJC)**  
*132 institutions, 2 states, Pacific region*

All accreditors must meet the **United States Department of Education (ED)** criteria for recognition and all (except NWCCU) are recognized by the **Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)**. All share similar standards for eligibility and reaffirmation. Other than the structural split in the Western region, WG II members found a high degree of comparability among accreditors, especially in the general use of self-study reflections, trained peer volunteer evaluators, on-site reviews, and recommendations from review teams to commissions to inform final decisions.

In all regions, peer evaluating teams consist of trained evaluators recruited to maximize the understanding of the institution under review. In the five regions with a single higher education accreditor, visiting teams to community colleges are composed predominately (in some regions, exclusively) of community college peers unless the institution offers bachelor’s degrees, then the teams have mixed two-year and four-year professionals. All regional accreditors were noted to maintain reciprocity with each other to help ease the transfer of student credits and units, as well as other considerations pertaining to quality assurance.

**Significant differences** were found when comparing ACCJC to other regional accreditors of community colleges, in terms of size, structure, organizational cultures, evaluation practices, resources provided, and engagement with member institutions. Examples include the following:

- Size of regional accreditors range from **132** (ACCJC) to **999** members (HLC).
- Several use different teams and review processes for **“off-site” and “on-site” evaluations**, with on-site teams much more limited in their focus.
- Several do not allow peer evaluators from the same state as that of the institution being visited.
- In most, decision-making occurs in multiple steps with college representatives engaged beyond the site visit.
- HLC offers **three accreditation pathways**, and decisions are made by the *Institutional Actions Council* (with the Commission acting only to resolve challenges in exceptional cases).
- WSCUC limits self-study Institutional Reports to **50-75 pages**, double-spaced.
- HLC maintains a *Peer Corp* of **1,600** faculty and administrators from institutions within the 19-state region trained to serve as peer reviewers and publishes a **list of institutional contacts** to serve as peer mentors to share accreditation experiences and resources.
- Several assign specific staff members to colleges as they begin reaffirmation (or application) for accreditation. For example, WSCUC assigns a *Staff Liaison* to serve as “counselor, coach/trainer, collaborator, communicator/interpreter, and lastly as compliance officer” to institutions (e.g., CSU Bakersfield’s [accreditation webpage](#) features a [presentation](#) by their WSCUC Liaison for their 2019 Reaffirmation).
- All seven accreditors oversee institutions awarding associate and bachelor’s degrees.
- No other region has separate commissions, standards, and processes for two-year colleges and other higher education institutions.

### Changing Landscape of Accreditation

In exploring accreditation trends, WG II noted that the unique voluntary, nongovernmental, peer-review system that distinguishes our U.S. regional higher education accreditation system has been under significant attack by the public and lawmakers in recent years. **Judith Eaton, President of CHEA** observed that the massive disruptions that have occurred in the economy, politics, culture, and government have also penetrated discussions about higher education quality assurance and accreditation. She notes, “*U.S. accreditation is undergoing a seismic shift.*”<sup>4</sup>

National accreditation policy advisor **Jamienne Studley (former Deputy Under Secretary, NACIQI Chair, ED)** led WG II members in reviewing **forces that have been moving higher education accreditation from a collegial, self-directed quality improvement process to a compliance-driven process answering to external stakeholders, federal lawmakers, and ED.** Lawmakers and the public have harshly criticized accreditors as “*watchdogs that don’t bite,*” charging them as being unreliable caretakers of federal financial aid that allow student loan debt to rise and academic outcomes and quality to falter. Both Democrats and Republicans have maintained that “*accreditation is broken,*” and ED has responded by requiring accreditors to monitor institutional metrics for graduation, jobs (gainful employment), and student debt. Think tanks and lawmakers have called for “bright line” measures for awarding accreditation, third-party auditors, states to develop their own accrediting systems, and new “innovative authorizers” to promote nontraditional providers’ eligibility for Title IV federal financial aid.

WG II also noted that **accreditation has become increasingly politicized**, with lawmakers, students, employers, and other stakeholders actively pressing for their personal judgments, concerns, and interests, often in the courts. Fundamentally, the group concluded that increased federal authority over accreditation and the shifting focus toward consumer protection is having major effects on accreditors, institutions, and students.

<sup>4</sup> *Disruption in the U.S. Accreditation Space*, J. S. Eaton, Winter 2017 issue of *International Higher Education*

## EXPLORATION OF OPTIONS

Workgroup II considered a variety of options in the context of the following question:

*What is the ideal model for the long-term and highest good of all higher education institutions in the region, given our shared concerns for changing (and shared) student populations, rising accountability demands, and rapidly emerging new models of learning and credentialing?*

WG II members identified and discussed the following factors affecting quality assurance of post-secondary education as background to discussion of potential models for the long-term higher education accreditation needs of the region:

- Public dissatisfaction with low college completion rates
- Dramatic changes in workforce needs with growing skills gaps (unfilled middle and high-skills jobs)
- Rising student debt and high default rates
- Higher public expectations for accountability and consumer protection
- Increased federal regulation (ED)
- Demographic shifts, with more adult, working, socio-economically diverse student populations
- Swirling attendance patterns with students attending multiple institutions
- Rapid growth of online and for-profit education
- New models of delivering and credentialing learning (Massive Open Online Courses, badging, open source, competency based, modularized credentials)
- Blurred lines between traditional sectors (community college baccalaureates, university associate degrees, university colleges, concurrent enrollment, CCC Associate Degrees for Transfer)

Members identified four key options for deeper exploration and discussion:

1. **Stronger relationship between ACCJC and WSCUC**
2. **Two-year colleges can choose an Accreditor (ACCJC or WSCUC)**
3. **Single accreditor for Western region (ACCJC members move to WSCUC membership)**
4. **Two-year colleges seek membership in another regional accreditor (not WSCUC)**

In multiple meetings and extensive discussions, WG II members explored the pros, cons, timelines, resources needed and long-term implications that might be associated with each of the four options. In relatively short order, members eliminated **Option 4**, concluding that pursuing a relationship with another accreditor outside the region would offer little additional value for students who typically seek transfer institutions within the region, and would likely be opposed by the **Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC)**, which supports the geographic delineation for regional accreditation.

**Option 2, whereby two-year colleges could choose to pursue membership in either ACCJC or WSCUC**, was noted to have somewhat of a precedent in Hawai'i and the Western Pacific with community colleges offering bachelor's degrees (although currently ACCJC is authorized by ED to accredit two-year colleges offering only one baccalaureate degree). WG II members determined that having sister institutions in the same region with different accreditors could spawn unwelcome competition among accrediting agencies, inconsistencies in quality assurance, and confusion of public understanding, especially within the CCC system.

**The two most viable options were determined to be Options 1 (stronger relationship between ACCJC and WSCUC) and Option 3 (single accreditor for Western region).** It was noted that building stronger linkages between existing accreditors (**Option 1**) could include joint conferences, commission meetings, and professional development. This option, while easiest to implement, was determined to offer little desired change. When the question of change emerged, members reflected that for some constituents, the perceived "accreditor problem" had to do solely with the tenor and style of ACCJC, with the assumption that once that was corrected, no further change would be needed. Since Workgroup I was well underway in collaborating with ACCJC to make improvements, members observed that some California colleagues would see no need for **Option 3**.

In considering **Option 1**, members debated the pros and cons of an accreditor serving only two-year colleges (ACCJC) and noted that it could provide expertise and commitment to the unique needs and interests of community colleges. However, they observed that ACCJC's singularity of focus almost exclusively on one system of colleges (CCCs) has the heavy disadvantage of insularity and propensity to be self-referencing. ACCJC's accreditation activities were noted to be marked by process details and intrusion into institutional nuances not found within other regional accreditors. WG II members concluded that the structural drawbacks of a small, narrowly focused, two-year accreditor outweigh its benefits. They noted advantages with a more comprehensive and diverse accreditor in the exchange of ideas, perspectives, and opportunities (**Option 3**). In addition to leveling the quality assurance playing field across sectors, a **single higher education accreditor** was seen to offer strength in political advocacy and to promote linkages across sectors to better serve students navigating their way through higher education pathways.

During these discussions in late fall 2016, WG II members recognized improvements underway with ACCJC, but determined that enhancements in the existing system did not negate the need for its attention to the **larger question of pursuing the optimal long-term model for providing quality assurance (and improvement) services to students and our communities for the long-term**, which is its designated charge.

After many months of meetings, research, discussion, consultation with accreditation experts and the U.S. Department of Education, and deliberation over a number of options and scenarios, **Workgroup II members reached unanimous agreement that the long-term needs of our students, colleges, and communities, particularly in light of the accelerating changes in, and demands on higher education, would best be served by affiliation with an accreditor that encompasses all segments of higher education for the Western region.** This consensus was recognized to be an ideal vision that stands apart from considerations of implementation.

## VISION FOR SINGLE ACCREDITOR

### *Why adopt the vision for a single higher education accreditor for the Western region?*

- ❖ **STRENGTH in ADVOCACY:** It provides power in numbers and a unified response to growing accountability demands and public scrutiny of higher education quality by offering more leverage in collective advocacy for policy and public support.
- ❖ **CONSISTENCY IN QUALITY ASSURANCE:** It reduces the risk of inconsistencies in accreditation standards, processes, and expectations among institutions and equalizes public perceptions of quality between segments.
- ❖ **RESPECT:** It enhances respect for community colleges through common quality assurance, elevating them to the same status level as four-year institutions.
- ❖ **QUALITY ENHANCEMENT:** It offers diverse learning partners for quality improvement efforts and reduces the limitations of insularity and homogeneity, especially among CCCs. It builds a learning community for sharing approaches to ongoing improvement with a shared focus on common standards for student success, stewardship, achievement and academic quality.
- ❖ **COMMON PATHWAYS:** It models the pathway most students follow in their educational journeys. It offers common quality standards for tens of thousands of community college students, especially from traditionally underrepresented populations, who transfer to universities in the region each year.
- ❖ **STUDENT SUCCESS:** It offers students, parents, lawmakers, funders, and the community at-large the assurance of high-quality learning options that promote student achievement and progression across the higher education continuum.

## DECISION & IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

### *What would be needed to implement the recommendation for a single Western region accreditor?*

Workgroup II recommends a **long-term implementation plan** that, if adopted, would be **gradually phased-in, over a period of up to 10 years**. Moving toward a single accreditor would require thoughtful review, multiple decision points, logistical balance, and time.

The following steps offer a potential pathway to implementation:

- 1. The member colleges of ACCJC (including public and private two-year colleges from California, Hawai'i, and the Western Pacific) would need to decide that they want to pursue this direction.** This decision would not be a “system” decision, but a collective decision of ACCJC member institutions. Since the *Chief Executive Officers of the California Community Colleges* (CEOCCC) Board prompted the development of Workgroups I and II, it is recommended that this body determine and oversee the decision-making process for CCCs, including participation of private two-year colleges in California. Similarly, the *Pacific Postsecondary Education Council* (PPEC), the consortium of presidents and chancellors of higher education institutions in the US and US-affiliated Pacific Islands, could coordinate decision-making among its member colleges.
- 2. If deciding to pursue this direction, the CEOs, on behalf of their collective institutions, would submit a formal petition of interest to WSCUC.** All accrediting bodies in the US interface with their member institutions through the CEO, so the collection of CCC/PPEC CEOs interested in moving forward with the option of forming a single higher education accreditor would serve as institutional spokespersons.
- 3. WSCUC would need to determine if it wants to pursue this request.** WSCUC would determine its process for making this decision, but pursuing a change of this magnitude likely would entail discussion first among WSCUC Commissioners and, if favorably received, a general vote among member institutions.
- 4. If WSCUC concurs with the request, it would apply for a change in scope of recognition from ED, typically a year-long process.** Preliminary discussions with ED representatives suggest that this process would be received favorably if WSCUC demonstrates appropriate capacity for this expansion, since the department recognizes a number of national accreditors and articulates no particular commitment to the regional accrediting structure. In addition, WSCUC has proven experience in accrediting two-year and four-year institutions each offering associate and bachelor's degrees.
- 5. Meanwhile, discussion and collaboration would ensue between WSCUC and two-year college representatives regarding process and implementation steps.** It is recommended that the CCC Chancellor's Office through its Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI), in collaboration with the PPEC, would work with WSCUC to provide a crosswalk document highlighting the relationship and alignment of ACCJC and WSCUC standards and processes to aid in the transition.
- 6. If moving forward, policy amendments would need to be undertaken by appropriate governing and accrediting bodies.** In California, the *California Community Colleges Board of Governors* and *Chancellor's Office* would need to amend current policy to affirm this proposed structure. The governing boards for the Hawai'i and Western Pacific institutions and private colleges would need to formalize their structure and approach. *WSCUC* would need to conduct a policy review and make changes as needed.

7. **Transition of college accreditation:** Each college would make application to the new accreditor at its next natural junction in its accreditation cycle (i.e., its next reaffirmation of accreditation).
- ◆ Each college would stay on its current cycle for accreditation and maintain its good standing with ACCJC until granted initial accreditation by WSCUC.  
[Note: ED requires that an institution seeking to change accreditors must be in good standing with their current accreditor, unless the accepting accreditor submits a justification to ED that is upheld.]
  - ◆ Approximately two years prior to its next re-accreditation deadline with ACCJC, a college would begin application to WSCUC. The new accreditation process with WSCUC takes at least 18 months, so it is recommended that a college begin the application for initial accreditation with WSCUC with adequate time to assure its continuance of accreditation with ACCJC.
  - ◆ WSCUC offers a preliminary consultation to help an institution estimate its readiness and a [workshop](#) on the stages of application. Institutions making application to WSCUC go through the following stages:
    1. **Eligibility** (peer review by *Eligibility Review Committee*)
    2. **Candidacy** (*Seeking Accreditation* peer visit)
    3. **Initial Accreditation** (*Seeking Accreditation* peer visit)
 [Note: An institution can achieve Initial Accreditation with the first Seeking Accreditation visit, skipping over the stage of Candidacy. Ordinarily Candidacy is granted first, during which the institution can continue to work towards initial accreditation for up to five years.]
  - ◆ During any transition, ACCJC would maintain accreditation operations and continue to pursue reforms to provide the best possible services to its members. ACCJC could work closely with stakeholder groups and WSCUC to aid in the smooth transition of member institutions, should this be the decision of some or all of its members.

## Timeline, Costs, Training & Support

**Timeline:** The full process of making decisions, achieving changes in scope and policy, and transitioning institutional accreditation for all community colleges in the region could take **up to 10 years**, depending on many factors. Beyond whatever time would be needed for institutional and commission decision-making, the ED process for change of scope typically takes **one year**. Approximately 20 percent of ACCJC member colleges become eligible for re-affirmation of accreditation each year, so following this schedule as a trigger for transition, it would take approximately **five years** for all current ACCJC members to begin a process of applying for membership in WSCUC. Achieving initial WSCUC accreditation generally takes **18 months**, but time frames vary according to the readiness of the institution.

**Costs:** ACCJC members would continue paying their membership dues until granted WSCUC *Initial Accreditation*. 2017-18 WSCUC [dues and fees schedule](#) (including eligibility and initial accreditation fees) are posted and updated annually. ACCJC dues are not currently posted, but it announced there would be no increase in rates for 2018-19. Following were 2017-18 annual membership dues for a college with 5,001-10,000 FTES:

- ◆ ACCJC: \$25,091
- ◆ WSCUC: \$24,600

**Training and support:** If moving forward with a transition plan for accrediting a number of community colleges, WSCUC would assign a *Staff Liaison* to each college as they begin the application for accreditation and could collaborate with IEPI and PPEC, as appropriate, to provide additional training and support for colleges making the transition to a new accreditor.

## ROLES & DECISIONS

### Who decides the future accreditation direction for each community college and the region?

This is a decision that each institution would need to undertake individually. Many stakeholder groups would need to become involved, but the first step would require that each accredited member college of ACCJC decide whether it wishes to pursue the change. Workgroup II recommends that the **CEO Board of the California Community Colleges (CEOCCC)** and the **Pacific Postsecondary Education Council (PPEC)** determine the process by which collective decisions be made among each group of colleges (including private institutions) for their sub-regions.

### What are the roles of state boards, system offices, and college governing boards in the decision process?

The California Education Code requires the **California Community Colleges Board of Governors (BOG)** to define conditions for colleges to receive state funding, and for those conditions to include accreditation status. Title 5 regulations (established by BOG) state that each college must be accredited by an accreditor recognized by ED, which is recommended by the State Chancellor and approved by the BOG.

- ◆ In January 2015, BOG removed language from prior Title 5 regulations that gave ACCJC sole authority over accreditation of the state's community colleges.
- ◆ In March 2016, [BOG](#) directed the State Chancellor to notify ACCJC of Board of Governor's support for the CEOCCC plan and to participate with the CEOs in coordinating the two workgroups. It also charged the state chancellor with the following directive:

*Present to the Board of Governors final recommendations on a new structure or agency for accreditation of the California Community Colleges based on the work of the planning groups coordinated by the CEO's, review the formal plan for college transition and bring to the Board of Governors the necessary information for the Board to recommend a new accreditor for the California Community Colleges to be submitted to the U.S. Department of Education for approval.*

Depending on the decision-making process directed by CEOCCC and PPEC, each local governing board would need to be apprised of the rationale, background issues, benefits and disadvantages, costs, and process of such a transition, and work with its CEO in reaching a decision deemed best for its students and community.



**Ultimately, the decision of whether to enact the vision provided in this report is a critical one for all to make, as it will define the future of higher education accreditation in our region.** The changes and challenges facing all our institutions call for more innovative approaches and stronger alliances across higher education sectors to support our shared students and communities. The many hours and months of meetings, research, consultation, and collegial discussion led Workgroup II members to the collective conclusion:

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*The long-term needs of our students, colleges, and communities would best be served by affiliation with an accreditor that encompasses all segments of higher education for the Western region.*

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Whatever the outcome of the decision-making process to follow this report, Workgroup II members are most encouraged that its representatives from across sectors, states, types of institutions, and accrediting agencies engaged with dedicated and collaborative spirits toward the unified goal of developing a more meaningful accreditation process that will serve all our institutions and students well into the future.