

Bobby Kahn
Trustee Area 1
State Center Community College District

- What are your educational qualifications, experience and training for the position?

I have a Bachelor of Science Degree from Pepperdine University in Business Administration. I owned and operated one of the largest real estate firms in the City of Madera for over 15 years. After selling the company I took a position with the Fresno Chamber of Commerce as part of the School-to-Career (STC) Grant working with local businesses to create business/education partnerships. I also worked with educators on the STC team to create work based learning programs. For the last 20+ years I have served as the Executive Director of the Madera County Economic Development Commission (MCEDC) helping attract new business to the Madera County region. A key component of successful economic development is being able to demonstrate a sustainable workforce with viable local education/training opportunities. For the last eight years, in addition to my role at MCEDC, I have served on the State Center Community College Board of Trustees and I am one of only two current trustees that have completed the Community College League of California "Excellence In Trustee Program."

- Why do you want to be a trustee on the SCCC Board of Trustees?

It is extremely important that everyone in our Central Valley has an opportunity to advance their educational skills through either an Associates Of Arts degree or a Certificate in Occupational Skills to improve their lives and those of their family. Being part of the SCCC Board provides me the opportunity to assure we are doing all we can to not only increase enrollment but to increase student success. As a Trustee I have the chance to help evaluate programs that increase the success rate of all of our students. I was also heavily involved in the successful passing of the \$485 million Measure C Bond. The funds generated from these bonds are allowing us to build new campuses (West Fresno, First Responders, Oakhurst) and new state-of-the-art facilities on all of our existing campuses. The new and modernized facilities will greatly enhance the learning environment for all students allowing them to develop skill sets that will make them successful in the fast changing world we live in today. Issues surrounding education continue to become more challenging and serving on the Board of Trustees provides me with a front line

opportunity to help solve these issues so the citizens of our region have an open door to higher education with minimum barriers. We are doing a lot, but there is more to be done. I want to take on those challenges to make our region a better place to live for all.

- What are your priorities regarding educating the residents of the SCCCD so they are prepared for the 21st century?

First and foremost is to knock down all barriers to the education system that prevent any of our residents from having the opportunity to maximize their ability to obtain a post-secondary education. Defined Career Pathway programs, special needs programs, eliminating remedial noncredit class requirements, financial aid programs that are staffed to provide adequate guidance and outreach to seek out students that may be in need of assistance (housing, food inadequacies, tutoring, mental health counselling). Providing the best and most modern learning environment as possible. It is our responsibility to assure that we are not only educating students but equipping them with the most modern skill sets possible. The world continues to evolve at a faster and faster pace, as a provider of higher education, we must set our standards at the highest levels to provide meaningful instruction to our students in learning spaces that allow them to maximize their education experience.

- What are the biggest challenges facing the residents and students of SCCCD?

One of the latest buzz words around higher education is “access for all.” That is a good sound bite but there is a lot more to it than three words. The residents and students in the SCCCD area face huge challenges that we need to address individually. Transportation can be a big hurdle. We need to continue to address this need with our ongoing work with local governmental agencies to offer improved and more frequent public transportation options at no cost or reduced cost. Finances are often an issue. I, and this board, have supported the California Promise for free tuition, however, this is a deeper problem than just tuition. Text books are a large expense item. I applaud SCCCD for aggressively pursuing free online text book options and working with faculty to have more instructors embrace online text books for their classes. Access to regular meals can be very disruptive to a student’s attempt to attend class and be in the optimum state of mind to learn. We have been addressing this issue with on campus food pantries and providing free snack food and meals to students. And of course there is student housing, another complex issue that seems to be an ever increasing problem. I have

attended several meetings with local developers to look for feasible partnerships that can create affordable, low cost housing for our students. SCCCD is also working closely with local municipalities to develop partnerships to increase affordable student housing. There are many, many issues and we need to attempt to address them all, with specific plans that include input from the public and all stakeholders so we can mitigate as many road blocks as possible. Outcomes need to be measured and evaluated to assure we are actually moving the needle toward solving the problem and not be just have “paper programs.” Collectively need to work hard on all issues that create barriers and to make access to a higher education a possibility for all our citizens.

- How would you like the SCCCD to address the problem of homeless students in community colleges?

This is much like the previous question but more specific. The homeless student population was exacerbated by COVID and the shutdown of restaurants and other service industries that employed a large student base. Many students could no longer afford traditional housing and many were forced into unacceptable living options such as living in their car, or worse, on the street. SCCCD needs to aggressively seek out viable options such as I listed above by working with our local municipalities to provide subsidized and/or affordable housing options. Again, these programs need to be well thought out with transparency and input from our community partners. Processes must be streamlined and solution based to address the issue as fast as possible.

- Funding for community colleges is based on how many students are enrolled each year. Fresno City College enrollment declined in Fall 2021 and again in Spring 2022. How should the SCCCD address falling enrollment?

Enrollment does represent a significant portion of funding, however, over the past few years the State has instituted Student Success as an additional factor. Currently the State has “locked in” certain funding levels due to COVID creating somewhat of a safety net for the next three years but funding has become a very complex equation that Board members need to be keenly involved to assure continued financial security for SCCCD. But to address the question, FCC and SCCCD have taken aggressive steps to rebuild our student enrollment numbers. FCC and other campuses have had Extreme Registration Events that are attended by counselors and financial aid consultants to help students not only register but get them on a career pathway and assist with financial needs. By researching data of non-returning students, we found a disproportionate amount of men of color were not

returning to school. We developed a special outreach program to contact these individuals in attempt to assist them in overcoming obstacles that are preventing them from continuing their education. We have advertised on local television radio and social media. It is important that we continue to reach out to students on the platforms in which they are engaging. Students are changing and we need to change with them.

- How much should it cost students to obtain an education at a community college? Is it financially worthwhile to attend a community college?

Finances should not be a barrier to obtaining an education at a community college. The state offers the California Promise that can waive tuition, online text books at no cost are becoming common with more instructors, there are a variety of programs such as the Board of Governors Fee Waiver (BOG waiver) that eliminates tuition, and financial aid and advisors at all of our campuses to assist students navigate the system. This financial aid can even include housing and other personal expenses. The education is definitely worthwhile and several studies support the fact that people with degrees have a much larger chance of higher earnings during their professional careers than those that do not have a degree. If a person wants a community college degree we at SCCCDC will make sure their goal is met and assist them with continuing their education goals.

- Who are your top 3 financial donors?

Richard Spencer

Dr. Bill Stewart

The Madera Sheik Community

- How should the community colleges respond to the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic?

Community Colleges should use SCCCDC as a model. When the State initiated the COVID State of Emergency we pivoted quickly to online classes. So much was accomplished in a short period of time to assure we served all of our students to the best of our ability. There were lessons learned and things were not perfect, but for the most part I think the Board reacted quickly and staff and faculty performed miracles to keep the education system flowing as normal as possible in a fully online capacity. We granted the Chancellor the authority to make emergency decisions regarding health and safety to put SCCCDC in the position to take swift action if needed. We implemented health and safety measures such as having most faculty and staff work remotely, masking requirements and vaccine/testing requirements. Now that the severe COVID surge is behind us (hopefully) and

immunity levels from either vaccine or from contracting COVID have increased dramatically, we are cautiously moving back toward more traditional work and teaching environments while still remaining focused on COVID trends. We have a COVID update report at each of our Board meetings and the Board COVID Ad Hoc committee still meets regularly with the Chancellor to monitor developments that may deem it necessary to change our current course of action. The main goal is to continue to provide outstanding learning opportunities for our students with the upmost sensitivity to their health and well-being and the health and well-being of our faculty and staff.