



EL CAMINO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

16007 Crenshaw Boulevard, Torrance, California 90506-0001

Telephone (310) 532-3670 or 1-866-ELCAMINO

www.elcamino.edu

Board of Trustees
El Camino College

September 8, 2014

Dear Members of the Board:

Since your last meeting, classes have begun and the campus is abuzz with the excitement of a new academic year.

We are back together again. The September 8 Board meeting is scheduled to comply with the requirements of filing final budgets with the County Superintendent of Schools and other agencies. The Board agenda is highlighted by a presentation on the Student Success and Support Program, the adoption of the El Camino Community College District 2014-15 final budget, a public hearing on Energy Conservation contracts, a public hearing on negotiations between the El Camino College Police Officers Association (POA) and the District, our regular consent agenda and a committee of the whole discussion on the Puente program prior to a closed session.

Your Board packet includes the following:

1. Final Budget – has also been posted online and available for public review since August 25
2. Memo from VP Higdon on the final budget
3. Memo from VP Higdon on Measure E, the S. J. Amoroso change order
4. Memo from VPs Arce and Nishime on Chronology of the Puente Program Planning Year
5. Memo from VP Nishime on F-1 Visa Students

Other supplemental reading includes the following:

- A. Letter from Dr. Curry regarding Measure C
- B. Social Media Analytics
- C. Long Beach Press Telegram article: "Long Beach's New City Public Schools charter has high hopes for new director"
- D. Community College Survey of Student Engagement – 2014 Key Findings

As mentioned earlier in this letter, the campus parking is impacted. We have reserved spaces immediately south of the Administration building for your convenience. If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the September agenda, please feel free to call Ms. Cindy Constantino or me prior to the meeting so we may research responses to your requests.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. Fallo
Superintendent/President

**EL CAMINO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT**

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August 24, 2014

TO: President Thomas Fallo

FROM: Jo Ann Higdon, M.P.A.

SUBJECT: Budget FY 2014-15

The California fiscal environment continues to gradually move in a positive direction. There is evidence the State's "wall of debt" is being addressed by the Governor. One very positive impact on community colleges is the commitment by the State to make apportionment payments to the colleges in full, and on time. While the lag time in receiving the State's payments is not eliminated altogether, it is expected to improve to the extent many colleges will be able to move from two borrowings (TRANS) to only one TRAN in the 2014-15 fiscal year.

Another positive sign is the funding of COLA at 0.85% for our general apportionment. While we had originally anticipated a COLA rate of double this amount, it became clear several months ago that our expectations were not going to be met this year. On the flip side, this COLA is not provided for categorical programs. Thus, additional refinement of the categorical budgets will be necessary. We must also be mindful that as Proposition 30 taxes begin to sunset in December of 2016, future years' COLAs and growth allocations will be dependent upon the health of, and the growth of, the State's economy as well as the "wall of debt" at both the State and Federal levels.

As you have now heard multiple times during the past four years, the 'deficit factor' remains perplexing and fluctuates dramatically. For FY 13-14, the State deficit factor is currently (at P2) 1.06%. Some believe the final deficit factor could increase to 2.2%. Both the ending balance for FY 13-14 and the budget for FY 14-15, use the State estimate of 1.06% as the deficit factor. The deficit funding recalculates at least four times during the year; thus, our "correction of prior year", our current year revenue, and our beginning/ending balances in the Unrestricted General Fund (Fund 11) will also change at least four times during the year. The other potentially large unknown factor is the revenue from RDA (Redevelopment Authority) projects. While we maintain a clear focus on the RDA dominos in our area, the potential State-wide ramifications are a concern.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for all community colleges will be achieving the "growth cap". As background, for at least the past 25 years, the State has identified a percentage by which a district is allowed to grow and receive funds for doing so. Until recently, that percentage has varied based upon specific factors in the individual districts (high school

graduation rates, square footage growth, percentage of underserved adults, and a minimum allocation of 100 FTES to all schools). When the base FTES was reduced in FY 08-09, any allowed "growth" (rebuilding) from that reduced base has been referred to as restoration. For FY 14-15, this restoration/growth percentage State-wide has been designated at 2.75%.

The Department of Finance (DOF) is demanding a new funding distribution formula. The formula recommended by the California Community College accounting board sub-committee was rejected by DOF and that sub-committee is in the process of trying once again to design a formula that will achieve DOF approval.

We have established a FTES goal of 19,500. Such a goal provides both the 291 FTES borrowed from summer of 2014 to be applied to the FY 2013-14 plus added growth/restoration FTES funding of approximately 3 to 4%. Currently, an additional 277 course sections are planned above the sections offered in the previous year. The number of added sections will ebb and flow as more information is known from the State and as our section fill rates stabilize.

On the positive side, the cost per unit remains at \$46. On the negative side, enrollments are soft throughout the State. Most all of the Northern California schools are struggling with enrollment growth. Many of the Southern California schools are also being challenged. This is likely another result of an improved California economy. There has always been an inverse relationship between full employment and the demand for community college classes. In fall of 2015, requirements for both BOG waivers and PELL grant become more restrictive. This will result in increased pressure on college enrollments throughout the state.

Department of Finance is visiting all web sites and reviewing class schedules to ascertain any classes they consider to be questionable for FTES generation. Academic Affairs could be greatly impacted by DOF scrutiny. In addition, care must be taken to make certain we are following all attendance accounting rules, especially those pertaining to dual enrollment with K-12s.

The college's Unrestricted General Fund (Fund 11) budget includes:

Sources of Funds:

1. COLA of 0.85% is recognized as budgeted revenue in Fund 11 (but not in the categorical funds).
2. A deficit factor of 1.06% reduces our expected State apportionment revenue in both FY 13-14 and FY 14-15. This is subject to change at least four times per year.
3. Based upon assurance from the State, cash flow is presumed to improve during FY 14-15.
4. Specific growth allocations from the State will not be known for months. As is standard practice at El Camino College, expected growth is not included in our budget revenue. Growth is recognized only at the end of the year when achievement is known.

Use of Funds:

5. Increased costs for additional class sections have been added to the budget.
6. Costs of implementation of all approved salary increases (and related mandatory benefits) have been calculated and included in the budget estimates.
7. Employer cost increases in both STRS and PERS have been added.
8. Similar to the past two years, we have budgeted a cost savings to reflect differences between our budgeted and actual expenditures and revenue (\$4 million on page 6 of the budget book).
9. Retiree health care costs have been reduced in Fund 11 by approximately \$830,000 due to the full-funding of our OPEB (Retiree Health Benefits Irrevocable Trust Fund) compliance. Those benefits will be paid from Fund 69 (page 23).

Transfers:

10. A list of transfers is presented on budget page 58. We are pleased to note the \$291,726 (page 15) transfer to the CDC Fund needed for FY 13-14 will not be required for FY 14-15. The Board took action to close that fund effective June 30, 2014.

Ending Balances:

11. The College's ending balance for Fund 11 for June 30, 2015 is projected to be \$14,268,151 (page 6) or 12.62%, which is safely above the State's required 5% watch level.

The draft pages pertaining to Fund 11 were presented to PBC for first reading on August 21, 2014. It was presented to the Board for first reading on August 18, 2014. The complete recommended budget will be presented to PBC on August 28, 2014 and to the Board at the September Board Meeting.

As always, we will maintain a careful watch on Sacramento legislation, interpretations, and directions from the Chancellor's Office. We will inform the Board of any major impacts to El Camino College's fiscal status.



Jo Ann Higdon, M.P.A
VP Administrative Services

**EL CAMINO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT**

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September 3, 2014

To: President Thomas Fallo

From: Jo Ann Higdon, M.P.A.

Subject: Change Order - S. J. Amoroso, Item F, Page E4

1. As the piping extensions were undertaken, it became clear that the connection could not be made in the manner specified in the plan documents due to existing underground piping between the two connecting points. Therefore, an extensive re-piping route was designed and built in order to accommodate that unforeseen condition.
2. The transformer was originally designed to be hung from the wall. Due to the need for head clearances, it was revised for floor mounting and placed on a concrete pad.
3. Panels were revised to be recessed in wall rather than surface mounted on the wall. For future access to spare breakers, additional conduits in the walls were needed.
4. Unforeseen conditions required modifications to storage and electrical rooms.
5. Code required an additional outlet on the wall. Additional framing was required to support the outlet.
6. Unforeseen conditions required new stud framing.
7. Upon dry walling the display cases, it was determined additional lighting would be needed to illuminate the display items.
8. Hinged covers were added to the A/V boxes in order to secure boxes when not in use.
9. Existing underground utilities were in conflict with the canopy columns and required the columns to be relocated. This required longer steel framing.
10. In lieu of card reader only access devices, combination key pad/ card reader devices were added to provide additional access controls and security.

11. As drywall and flooring was removed throughout the building, it became very apparent the existing walls and flooring were not square or level. Numerous adjustments were made throughout the building in most every room to achieve the changes to walls and floors. The floor in the lower level required a moisture barrier to allow the flooring to properly adhere to the surface.



Jo Ann Higdon, M.P.A
Vice President Administrative Service



EL CAMINO COLLEGE

Vice President – Academic Affairs and Vice President of Student and
Community Advancement

3 September 2014

TO: President Thomas Fallo

FROM: Francisco Arce and Jeanie Nishime

SUBJECT: Chronology of Puente Program Planning Year

In her email on July 31, 2014, Julia Vergara, Associate Director of the Puente Project, based at the University of California, proposed that the ECC Puente Program take a planning year in 2014 – 2015 to address staffing issues of the program.

Those issues are the following:

1. Dr. Regina Smith, Dean of Counseling and the administrator in charge of the Puente Program, is on leave;
2. Maribel Hernandez, the Puente Program Coordinator and Counselor (part-time counselor), resigned;
3. Dr. Rachel Ketai, the Puente Program English Instructor and Co-coordinator, has requested a 50 percent reduced load that prevents her from fulfilling her regular duties this year as co-coordinator.

While the Counseling Department appointed Dr. Margaret Quinones to be the Puente Program Counselor for one year, there were no other English faculty members to take over Dr. Ketai's assignment, leaving the program without the necessary staff to offer the program.

Ms. Vergara followed up with another email on August 5 indicating concerns about the one-year assignment of a program counselor, preferring instead to wait until a permanent counselor is in place. Vergara again reiterated the need for the college to embark on a planning year to strengthen the program.

One might describe the situation as a perfect storm, and on August 12, the Dean of Humanities concurred with the recommendation to take a year to allow for the college to plan the future of the program. We concurred with the recommendation. The 25 students enrolled in the Puente Program were contacted to explain the changes and were reassigned to a First Year Experience (FYE) program. Dr. Ketai will still teach the English course designed for Puente and Dr. Yun Chen will teach its corresponding Human Development course in fall 2014 under the auspices of the FYE program. Dr.

Quinones will serve as the counselor for the continuing Puente students (75-100) from past cohorts and has been reassigned 4.5 hours of her 26-hour weekly student contact time for Puente. We believe these actions will allow former Puente students to continue to be served with appropriate counseling support.

In order to plan for the future of the program, the Office of Institutional Research will prepare a comparative study of the outcomes for the Puente Program students. Comparative studies already exist for Project Success and FYE program cohorts. These studies compare outcomes for students in these special programs against a matched cohort of students who did not participate in the program. Although data will be examined, all aspects of the program's benefit to the campus community will be considered during this year of planning and review.

Attached is a copy of the budget for Puente, First Year Experience, Project Success, and DSPS. All of these programs received supplemental funding from the District.

| PUENTE | | | |
|---------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | 2011-2012 | 2012-2013 | 2013-2014 |
| Students in program | 140 | 123 | 106 |
| Fund 12 | \$1,500 | \$1,500 | \$1,500 |
| Fund 15 | \$58,000 | \$52,000 | \$45,000 |
| Auxiliary | \$7,125 | \$5,059 | \$5,059 |
| Humanities Faculty | \$15,424 | \$13,843 | \$20,542 |
| Total | \$66,299 | \$60,784 | \$70,601 |

| FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | 2011-2012 | 2012-2013 | 2013-2014 |
| Students in program | 700 | 500 | 700 |
| Fund 11 | \$382,134 | \$392,239 | \$392,239 |
| Fund 15 | | | \$67,000 |
| Auxiliary | \$2,800 | \$2,800 | \$2,800 |
| Total | \$385,634 | \$395,539 | \$462,739 |

| PROJECT SUCCESS | | | |
|------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | 2011-2012 | 2012-2013 | 2013-2014 |
| Students in program | 102 | 103 | 88 |
| Fund 11 | \$10,019 | \$12,248 | \$12,500 |
| Fund 15 | \$42,000 | \$38,000 | \$42,000 |
| Auxiliary | \$9,500 | \$6,745 | \$6,745 |
| Total | \$61,519 | \$56,993 | \$48,745 |

| SPECIAL RESOURCE CENTER (DSPS) | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| | 2011-2012 | 2012-2013 | 2013-2014 |
| Students in program | 1,974 | 1,968 | 1,967 |
| Fund 12 – Categorical | \$1,191,018 | \$1,213,798 | \$1,121,455 |
| Fund 15 | \$509,060 | \$509,060 | \$425,000 |
| Auxiliary | | \$42,222 | |
| Total | \$1,700,078 | \$1,765,080 | \$1,546,455 |

To: Arce, Francisco
Subject: Puente planning year - 2014-2015

From: Julia E. Vergara [<mailto:julia.vergara@berkeley.edu>]
Sent: Wednesday, September 03, 2014 4:15 PM
To: Arce, Francisco
Cc: Geraghty, Elise; Lew, Thomas; Ketai, Rachel; Nishime, Jeanie; Frank Garcia; Grace Ebron; Quinones, Margaret
Subject: Puente planning year - 2014-2015

Dear VP Arce,

It was a pleasure to speak with you last week regarding the Puente Program at El Camino College. We are so proud of our 29 years of partnership in service to underrepresented and first-generation college student populations and look forward to working with you and other college administrators this year.

Because of staff changes in both the English and counseling departments, Puente feels that instituting a planning year during the 2014-2015 academic year will be in the best interest of the program at El Camino. Puente will provide direct service to the program during the planning year as outlined below:

Fall 2014

Provide assistance and support to administration as they identify a Puente instructor and counselor.

Provide support to Puente faculty as they actively work with Puente Phase III students who are working towards transfer.

Share best practices with Puente faculty as they plan and develop coursework and syllabi's for their Fall 2015 English and Personal Development courses.

Arrange a site visit with Puente Instructor, Rachel Ketai, Puente counselor (once they have been appointed), Dr. Quinones, and other site administrators.

Spring 2015

Provide support through Puente's Regional Training, a 2-day professional development opportunity focusing on program implementation, program best practices, and discipline-specific workshops; provides opportunity for collaboration among southern California colleges with Puente programs.

Provide assistance during the student recruitment process through one-on-one coaching.

Provide support to reinvigorate the mentoring program and re-establish relationships with mentors through a series of mentor trainings and mentor networking event. (Puente will provide funding of up to \$1,500 during 2014-2015 to continue the mentoring component during the planning year).

Summer 2015

Provide support or through Puente Summer Institute (PSI) training. The PSI is a foundational training designed to introduce new Puente practitioners to Puente's philosophy and model. The agenda topics ensure that participants understand all aspects of the program, such as how to integrate all three components and work as a Puente team.

I hope this outline helps, and provides you with a better understanding of how Puente intends to support your Puente program during its planning year. We look forward to building a stronger program at El Camino, and ensuring we continue to help underrepresented students transfer to four-year institutions. Please contact Ms. Ebron or me if you have further questions.

Kind Regards,

Julia Vergara
Associate Director, Community College Programs & Training
The Puente Project
Center for Educational Partnerships
Division of Equity and Inclusion
University of California Berkeley
(510) 664-9918
(510) 846-6274

**EL CAMINO COLLEGE****Office of the Vice President-Student & Community Advancement
Jeanie Nishime – Vice President**

September 2, 2014

TO: President Thomas M. Fallo

SUBJECT: F-1 Visa Students

Recruitment of international F-1 visa students is primarily through overseas recruitment trips and the use of in-country recruitment agents. In 2013-14, travel expenses and overtime for the employee amounted to \$36,237. Recruitment agents are paid \$250 per semester for a maximum of two semesters for each student recruited who enrolls in twelve or more units. In order to incentivize our agents, an additional \$1000 is paid for high volume referrals of ten or more students.

We prefer to use both methods of recruitment because the F-1 coordinator has the opportunity to speak with the agents while overseas and to ensure their commitment to seeking students who wish to pursue their education at ECC. Another important source of referrals for the credit program is our not-for-credit English Language Academy (ECLA). Approximately forty students from ECLA transferred into the credit program this fall.

Each international student who enrolls in twelve units generates \$3,372 in tuition and fees. Eighty students would generate \$269,760 in local income. We typically enroll 750-850 students each fall. All F-1 students are required to enroll full time although an exception can be made for one semester. At 750 students, the college will receive approximately \$2.5 million in local revenue.



Jeanie M. Nishime, Ed.D.

JMN/mre



August 27, 2014

Campus Community,

Serving the Communities of
Compton, Lynwood, Paramount
and Willowbrook, as well as
portions of Athens, Bellflower,
Carson, Downey, Dominguez,
Lakewood, Long Beach, and
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KEITH CURRY, Ed.D.
Chief Executive Officer

THOMAS E. HENRY
Special Trustee

As you are aware, Compton Community College District will have a facilities bond measure on the November 4, 2014 ballot. If approved by voters, Measure C will provide funds that will allow the Compton Community College District to upgrade classrooms, labs, infrastructure, and instructional equipment, while making much-needed health and safety repairs and energy efficiency improvements.

We appreciate and welcome your assistance in the public awareness/informational efforts. Along those lines, please see the attached document which includes message points for you to share - either via the handout, or verbally- with students, family, friends, etc.

Please also visit the new Measure C Web page: district.compton.edu/measure-c, which contains additional information about Measure C. The Web page will be updated frequently, so please check back for new information throughout the months of September and October.

Please remember, you may share INFORMATION, such as the attached document and all information included on the web page about Measure C as an employee of the District. All campaign efforts requesting support of Measure C must be conducted on your personal time and via personal devices.

Thank you for sharing this important information. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments.

Sincerely,


Keith Curry
CEO

Fast Facts About



El Camino College Compton Center & Measure C

1. New and upgraded facilities supported by Measure C would ensure the delivery of a quality education, career training leading to in-demand jobs, and vital student support services for students, veterans, and working adults served by the Compton Community College District for years to come.
2. New facilities and instructional equipment will expand access to training programs that will help students prepare and find jobs in automotive technology, aerospace, nursing, early childhood development and other high-demand careers that require specific skills.
3. A bond is necessary to complete the facilities upgrades needed at the 62-year-old Compton campus and enable the District to qualify for state matching funds for buildings.
4. El Camino College Compton Center is an important resource for our community, preparing students for jobs and transfer to four-year universities.
5. Measure C will repair or replace leaky roofs, outdated electrical wiring, deteriorating gas, electrical and sewer lines; improve fire safety and security on campus; as well as upgrade outdated computer labs and classroom technology.
6. El Camino College Compton Center is a valuable community resource that provides an affordable, local education, and increases the educational opportunities of area students, veterans and active military in the District.
7. Measure C will address urgent and basic repairs such as upgrading electrical systems, gas and sewer lines, fixing leaky roofs, repairing bathrooms and replacing outdated plumbing and wiring to make our local college clean and safe for learning.
8. Measure C projects include the construction of two completely new instructional buildings, a new student services building, a new physical education complex; and renovations to the Vocational Technology and Math/Science buildings.
9. These updates will enable the Compton Community College District to maintain El Camino College Compton Center as a valuable community resource that provides affordable, local education, increases access to education for all residents, and prepares students and returning veterans for university transfer or entry to a successful career.
10. By law, all Measure C funds must be spent according to the Project List. A Citizens' Bond Oversight Committee will review audits and ensure funds are spent as promised to voters. No bond funds can be spent on administrator pensions or salaries. All money will stay local and cannot be taken by Sacramento politicians.



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M-E-M-O-R-A-N-D-U-M

Date: September 2, 2014

To: President Fallo

From: Ann M. Garten 
Director, Community Relations

Re: Social Media Analytics

Per the request at a previous Board meeting, below are analytics for El Camino College's social media.

The fall 2014 paid social media advertising campaign (July 28-August 24), included Facebook ads and Twitter ads. Each ad directed viewers to a specific Web "landing" page. From the landing page, viewers are able to access the Online Application, Steps to Enrollment, and Searchable Class Schedule. The ads were monitored daily by the Fifty & Five company for performance and analysis. Target audiences were expanded or contracted by geography, age etc. to increase the reach, or audience, of the ads.

Facebook Ads:

- Ad #1 targeted 18-24 year-olds within the District and nearby zip-codes. The focused message was "Classes Added" and "Apply Online Today." Total number of unique visitors who came to the ECC Web page via this ad: 3,801.
- Ad #2 targeted 25-55 year-olds within the District and nearby zip-codes. Messaging included: "Increased Earnings" and "Earn a degree or certificate with evening & online classes." Total number of unique visitors who came to the specific ECC Web landing page via this ad: 1,193.

Twitter Ads:

- Ad #1 targeted high school seniors/grads (ages 18-24) living within 10 miles of ECC. 140-character "tweets" included: "El Camino College students transfer to the university of their choice! Focus on your future – apply online today." Total number of unique visitors to the specific ECC Web landing page via this ad: 44
- Ad #2 targeted adults (ages 25-55) living within 10 miles of ECC. Tweets included: "Earn a degree or certificate with evening and online classes at El Camino College. Train for a career and make more \$\$\$." Total number of unique visitors to the specific ECC Web landing page via this ad: 83.

Free ECC Social Media:

El Camino College's Facebook page has over 36,000 fans, an 83% increase over July 2013.

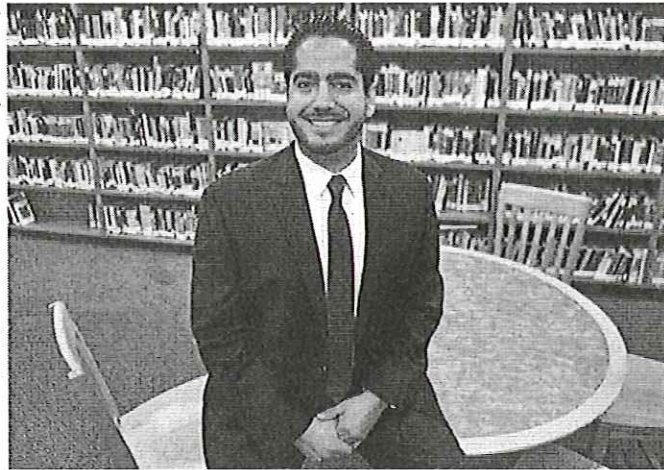
- Facebook example: April 11 post about the Fire Academy graduation was viewed by 5,100 unique viewers; garnered 417 likes, comments and shares, including 321 clicks to view the photo in full size.

El Camino College's Twitter account increased the number of followers by 35% since July 2013, to reach 4,740 followers.

- Twitter example: March 5 tweet had a "reach" or number of people who saw the post, of 120,100 viewers. Use of trending hashtags like #Gravity and #Oscars timed with the 2014 ECC Space Science Day, was further enhanced by guest speaker NASA astronaut Wheelock, who was live tweeting and asking guests to tag him @Astro_Wheels in their own tweets.

El Camino College's Instagram account, which was relatively inactive last year, now has over 600 followers – up 500% over July 2013. Photos are posted daily, with many reaching over 200 likes.

Long Beach's New City Public Schools charter has high hopes for new director
 By Nadra Nittle, Long Beach Press Telegram
 POSTED: 08/29/14



John Vargas, the new head of New City Public Schools. Long Beach, July 24, 2014.
 (Brittany Murray / Staff Photographer)

LONG BEACH >> The new leader of a Long Beach charter school that has battled low test scores is energizing the community with fresh hope, some of which he attributes to controversial Common Core State Standards guidelines that California schools must implement this school year.

Members of the New City Public Schools community say they have high expectations for its executive director, John Vargas, and his background in linguistics and financial acumen as he guides the school.

"It was clear from when we first spoke to John that he understands and embraced (New City's) mission, that he was interested in and excited about the kind of pedagogical underpinnings of our school, our charter and how we do education," said Madeline Holler, chairwoman of New City's board of directors.

Founded in 2000, New City School serves more than 400 students in transitional kindergarten through grade 8. Long Beach Unified authorizes the charter of the school, which offers a dual-immersion Spanish-language curriculum and focuses on such areas as comprehensive student learning, social justice and community-building. New City is one of two charter schools in Long Beach. The other, Intellectual Virtues Academy, opened last year and serves middle-school students.

The school has taken some headline-making hits over the years. Last November, it faced the possible revocation of its charter because students — the majority of whom are low-income English Language Learners — failed to make the grade on the California Standards Test the previous year. It marked the third consecutive year since 2011 that New City did not meet standardized test score targets. In February, however, the school

received a reprieve from state Department of Education officials, who determined that New City took adequate steps to improve.

The phase-out of the California Standards test may work in New City's favor. Public schools are implementing Common Core State Standards, a national set of guidelines for English-language arts and math instruction for kindergarten through 12th grade. From this school year forward, California students will take the Smarter Balanced assessment aligned to Common Core.

Since 2010, 43 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards, which state governors and education commissioners developed with feedback from teachers, parents, school principals and educational experts. Before Common Core, different states had different academic standards for these core subjects.

Opposition has come from cities such as Bellflower, and conservative groups and politicians have characterized Common Core as a federal intrusion on states' rights, arguing that it will result in states losing control over the academic benchmarks they want students to meet. In July, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker called for the Legislature in his state to repeal its adoption of the standards.

Vargas, who comes to New City from the Crown Preparatory Academy charter school in Los Angeles, thinks the Common Core standards strongly suit New City students.

"One thing I believe people will see is that our constructivist model is more closely aligned to (Common Core) than the past standards, so we will see some natural increases in our standardized test results," said Vargas, who served as Crown's business and operations manager.

The constructivist model derives from the idea that people acquire knowledge through the exchange of their perceptions and experiences. The theory was developed by the late Swiss psychologist and philosopher Jean Piaget.

Holler believes that New City is in a "really interesting and strong position" because of Common Core. She said the new standards, which focus on analytical and evidence-based learning, complement New City's focus on comprehensive learning. She's excited that Vargas will lead New City as the Common Core State Standards fully roll out in schools.

Vargas said that throughout the school year, New City will assess students on their understanding of the Common Core State Standards to monitor their progress.

Now pursuing a master's degree in linguistics at Cal State Long Beach, Vargas said that New City's dual-immersion program attracted him to the school.

"The dual-immersion program really gives hope for students to become fully bilingual," he said. "It involves English and Spanish and will obviously give students an appreciation

of two cultures. As our nation continues to become a multicultural melting pot, it's definitely an advantage for our students to have."

Vargas succeeds Sabrina Bow as executive director at New City. Bow has since launched her own business, Evergreen Associates LLC, which provides support to schools and school leaders.

Although Vargas is just 32 years old, he said that he has racked up extensive experience in education. The UCLA graduate co-founded Global Education Academy, a Los Angeles charter school; served as vice president of school finance at ExED, a Los Angeles business that provides financial services to charter schools; and as executive director for Full Circle Learning Academy, another Los Angeles charter school. He was a Hawthorne board member and is an El Camino College District trustee.

Vargas said that his business know-how will benefit New City as the school applies for the five-year renewal of its charter this school year. He said that fiscal and financial skills play key roles in the operation of charter schools.

"I believe I have the expertise to help New City move forward," he said.

Holler agreed, pointing out that charter schools are responsible for their own finances.

"There's no one to sort of hand it off to," she said. "We make our budget and funding plan. We're like our own entity."

Giselle Fong, a mother of two New City students, served on the hiring committee that selected Vargas as executive director. She said that Vargas has the skills to keep the school going strong.

Fong said that she's excited about Vargas because he's bilingual and he could be sensitive to the needs of English learners, who make up roughly half the student body at New City.

"He understands how important it is to create community," Fong said. "I get the sense that he would embrace the existing culture of having a really strong community and parent involvement."

Fong said that at New City, "every person counts," be they parents, students, administrators or teachers.

Doris Gorski, who teaches third through fifth grades at New City, participated in a teacher forum at the school when Vargas made a presentation. She said that Vargas understands the dynamics of charter schools and will be an asset to New City.

"I think New City School has been on a great trajectory and it is a good feeling that we can continue on the same path with John Vargas as executive director," Gorski said.

Vargas certainly believes he's poised to take the school to new heights.

"It's a fresh start for everyone, including me and the administration," he said. "It's a great opportunity to take school to the next level."