

****For Immediate Release Wednesday, April 5, 2006****

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The James Irvine Foundation Launches ConnectEd: The California Center for College and Career

New Poll of California's 9th and 10th Graders Reveals that Connecting Classroom to Real World Motivates Students to Learn and Stay in School

New Center to Prepare More Students for College and Career, Advance Academically Rigorous Career and Technical Education

SAN FRANCISCO — After a year of discussion regarding California's failure to prepare many of our youth to succeed in college and the workplace, The James Irvine Foundation is committing \$6 million to a new statewide center to expand the number of educational pathways that prepare students for both college and career.

"Whether you're talking about drop-out rates or the number of youth unprepared for college and career, the basic point is the same: High schools simply are not working for too many of California's young people," said Jim Canales, President and CEO of The James Irvine Foundation. "We need to promote programs of study that blend academic rigor and real-world learning if we hope to inspire more of our youth to stay and succeed in school. ConnectEd: The California Center for College and Career is dedicated to expanding these learning opportunities that prepare students for college and career, not one or the other."

ConnectEd's launch is timely, as a new statewide poll reveals that more than 90 percent of ninth and 10th graders believe tying classes to their future and real-world careers would inspire them to work hard and do well in school. The poll, commissioned by The James Irvine Foundation and conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, adds the student voice to the debate about the potential of real-world learning, which has received considerable attention lately. Gov. Schwarzenegger recently committed to spend \$50 million this year to expand career and technical education programs, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell outlined his commitment to fostering career academics in his State of Education 2006 speech.

The poll, conducted late last month, surveyed a representative cross section of 619 ninth and 10th graders throughout California at risk of falling behind academically and not reaching their full potential. The key findings from this research include:

- The vast majority (73 percent) of these students say they could be doing better in school if they were motivated to work harder.
- The idea of a school where academic work is more closely tied to preparing students for college and career is highly appealing to a large majority of students. Seventy-three percent of students say this kind of school appeals to them at least a fair amount.
- Eighty-nine percent of students believe that a school where they could take courses that they need for college but also have more opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge relevant to future careers would be more interesting to them, and 91 percent say they would be more motivated to work hard and do well if they attended this kind of a school.
- Three in four students say that a smaller focused learning community would be better for them in terms of helping them meet higher standards and expectations.

ConnectEd will be a new hub for innovative practice, policy and research, focusing on integrating the best career and technical education programs with rigorous high school academic curricula. Specifically, ConnectEd will support the development of high school curricula that are at once academically rigorous *and* inclusive of the range of aspirations and learning styles of California's diverse student population. These demanding programs, which will satisfy California's "a to g" requirements, connect academics with today's thriving industries and challenging career sectors. Students learn math through the lens of engineering, and English composition through the lens of law and government or business and marketing.

"It's real-world learning for real-world success," said Gary Hoachlander, President of ConnectEd. "This blend ensures that students benefit from the best of both worlds, and as a result, more students will graduate from high school prepared for college and career."

ConnectEd is currently collaborating with six model programs, helping evaluate their success so that policy-makers, educators and parents will have an informed understanding of what makes them effective and how to offer similar opportunities to students statewide.

The survey released today by The James Irvine Foundation and ConnectEd reinforces the value of academically challenging, real-world programs of study. The poll results also reinforce the growing recognition among policy-makers, researchers and educators that, in order to engage students and address California's drop-out crisis, high schools must offer students more than one way to learn. Several prominent education advocates and policy-makers applauded the founding of ConnectEd to help anchor that conversation and identify, support and expand pathways that prepare students for college and career.

"The Schwarzenegger administration is committed to career and technical education as part of our overall strategy to help more students graduate prepared for college and the 21st century economy," said Scott Himmelstein, Deputy Secretary of Education and Chief of Staff for the Office of the Secretary of Education. "That's why the Governor committed \$50 million this year to making these programs available to more California high school students, and proposed a \$1 billion bond for career and technical education facilities."

"We all know the consequences of failing to inspire and prepare young people for the 21st century economy," said State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell. "No less than California's standing as a global economic leader and the California dream are at stake."

"A growing number of educators and policy-makers agree that it's time for a new approach to high school education," said Jeannie Oakes, Presidential Professor of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles and ConnectEd board member. "Our high schools need to offer students more than one way to learn so that more young people graduate with the knowledge and skills to succeed."

Ted Mitchell, chair of the ConnectEd board, CEO of NewSchools Venture Fund and chair of the Governor's Advisory Committee on Education Excellence said, "I firmly believe that ConnectEd's approach — expanding the number of pathways for students to reach college and career — will help California ensure that the youth of today are prepared to participate and drive tomorrow's economy."

"By offering students a blended curriculum that combines high academic expectations with connections to real-world skills, we can ignite students' passion to learn and help them succeed in college and the workplace," added Ramon Cortines, former Superintendent of the Los Angeles, Pasadena, San Jose and San Francisco unified school districts and a ConnectEd board member.

More information about the new poll and ConnectEd's work can be found at www.ConnectEdCalifornia.org.