

# OC LEADER BOARD

Opinion, Analysis, Insight

## Growing Talent and a Better Jobs Strategy for OC



**By Kimberly Chavalas Cripe**  
President, Children's Hospital of OC

What if more companies searched for young business talent the way colleges and pro teams search for promising athletes? In many sports, talent is identified in high school and sometimes as early as grade school. Prospects are brought into sophisticated programs to cultivate and groom talent in preparation for the big leagues.

As executives who do a good deal of hiring, we believe strongly that our K-12 system would benefit tremendously from more business involvement, especially in providing work-based learning (WBL) opportunities. Our workers need transferrable skills that use more situational adaptability, social intelligence, communication savvy and STEM literacy.

These are the skills that businesses require and that workers need to command higher wages in an expensive region like OC.

In healthcare, medtech, fintech, and other growth segments of the OC economy, deep talent pools are needed. Why not begin with a business-led system of 21st century career pathways in high school?

**Mike Mussallem** and **Doug Wilson** wrote a Jan. 13 Leader Board article outlining how OC is simply not creating enough high-wage jobs to sustain strong economic development in the county.

The **CEO Leadership Alliance of Orange County (CLA-OC)**, comprising executives from more than 40 prominent OC companies, is now implementing a "flywheel strategy" with four distinct workstreams—two focused on attracting and growing innovation jobs and two focused on developing and retaining the talent to fill those jobs.

This is the first of four follow-up Leader Board articles to explain CLA-OC's strategy. We are committed to working with government, nonprofits and education to help build a thriving OC for all.

Many good things are being done to move us in the right direction. Our focus is working together to help build OC into a top tier innovation region in America.

The crucial point made in the previous article was that highly skilled innovation jobs hold the key to growing our economy, because each innovation job has a multiplier effect, creating five additional jobs: three service jobs and two high-paying professional jobs.

Equally important, in our view, is tapping underserved and first-gen students as a way for OC businesses to expand the search for talent beyond business as usual. Almost 50%, or 240,000, of the students in our K-12 public school system are Latino/Hispanic.

We live in a time of unbelievable market disruption, which we CEOs know can come from any direction. Cultivating a workforce of diverse viewpoints and skill sets is not only the smart HR strategy. It's our obligation as business leaders to also increase our companies' practice of inclusion and equity.

OC became a minority-majority region in 2004 and today it's the 18th most diverse region in the country. This is our strength if we thoughtfully avoid what has been called the "segregated innovation" pattern that typifies many other high-tech hubs. However, leadership is needed to create an opportunity-rich jobs market to build a thriving OC for all.

A better jobs strategy will benefit everyone, and it all starts with investing in talent in the new economy.

**CHOC** is now the 18th largest employer in the county, and over the

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next five years we plan to expand significantly. More than ever, we want to extend our talent acquisition strategy into high schools and community colleges.

At **PIMCO**, the quest for talent has meant an engagement strategy at universities starting earlier, with freshmen and sophomores. Now, through CLA-OC, our two companies have joined with the **University of California-Irvine**, the second-largest employer in the county, for an 18-month career pathways pilot.

Last month, the Attallah College of Educational Studies at **Chapman University** released an ePrize (Education Prize) Career Pathways Request for Proposal. It is open to all underserved high schools in OC, especially those that have partnered with nonprofits and community colleges to build enhanced pathways programs.

Connecting students in our K-12 public school system with our leading businesses—more easily and often—will leverage millions of public dollars spent on Career Technical Education, Career Pathways grants, infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum reform, and result in increased working wages and job-ready talent. That is how we begin the journey from good to great!

We want far more companies involved so that the entire county benefits.

While the ePrize began at Chapman, we have now engaged with **CSUF**, **UCI**, **OCBC**, **OCDE**, and the **OC STEM Initiative** to collectively design the pilot around data driven metrics.

The **Sun Family Foundation** (see story, page 4), **Kay Family Foundation**, and **Pamela and Andrew Horowitz Family Fund** generously provided the ePrize award funding to make this strategic pilot possible. Collective impact is a highly effective, community building approach to solving complex problems.

Finally, targeting underserved, first-gen students require participating CLA-OC companies to think differently about talent acquisition. Encouraging young talent begins with removing impediments to educational achievement; and for our most vulnerable students, a debilitating barrier is child hunger.

We want to help advance community efforts in removing this obstacle. Providing leadership in this effort are CLA-OC Executive Committee members **Mark Wetterau**, CEO of **Golden State Foods**, and **Chris Wing**, CEO of **Scan Health Plan**. They are joined by PIMCO, **Western Digital** and companies that have contributed to purchasing a mobile kitchen on wheels to deliver food to underserved neighborhoods where students live.

This pilot program is the result of a partnership with **Centralia Elementary School District**, **OC United Way**, and **OCDE**. CLA-OC's intent is to launch an innovative, effective and sustainable approach that can be replicated in other schools countywide.

We know this is just a start.

Ours is a decade-long vision of OC's leading businesses, partnering through CLA-OC with all key stakeholders, to invest more strategically in the county's human capital to drive prosperity and a thriving OC for all. The next Leader Board article will be by **Jim Morris**, president and CEO of **Pacific Life Insurance Co.**, who leads our workstream to retain and develop talent from OC's major universities.

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