

WEST KERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT (WKCCD)/TAFT COLLEGE GOVERNING BOARD ANNOUNCES FINALISTS FOR SUPERINTENDENT/PRESIDENT POSITION *page 1*



The West Kern Community College District Governing Board is pleased to announce the selection of four finalists for the position of Superintendent/President at Taft College. Following a comprehensive nationwide search, the finalists were recommended to the Governing Board by a representative search committee comprised of faculty, staff, students, and community members.

The finalists, listed in alphabetical order, are **Dr. Samasoni (Sam) Aunai, Clint Cowden, Dr. Jerry Fliger, and Mike Giacomini**. Biographical information for each candidate is provided below.

The campus community and members of the public are invited to participate in the selection process by attending the Candidate Forums and providing feedback. The forums will be held on March 23, 2026. Specific times and locations for each candidate's session are listed below. Faculty, staff, students, and community members are encouraged to attend to hear directly from the candidates. The forums will also be livestreamed and recorded for later viewing.

The Governing Board will conduct final interviews with the candidates on March 23, 2026. A selection is anticipated shortly thereafter, followed by Governing Board consideration and approval of an employment agreement. The anticipated start date for the new Superintendent/President will be determined at a later time.

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Dr. Samasoni (Sam) Aunai

Candidate Forum: March 23, 2026, 1:30-2:15pm, Room CIL 730

Live Stream: <https://taftcollege-edu.zoom.us/j/86365564869>

Recording: Link will be available at the end of Forums

Provide feedback: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/saunai>

Electronic feedback surveys will close at 8:30am on 3/24/26

Dr. Samasoni (Sam) Aunai is a mission driven higher education executive with close to twenty years of leadership, driving institutional excellence and student achievement within the California Community College system. He currently serves as the Vice President of Educational Services at Coalinga College, where he also served as Interim President. Dr. Aunai is recognized for his strategic aptitude in academic operations, enrollment management, fiscal stewardship, and accreditation oversight.

His administrative trajectory includes roles as Vice President and Dean at Porterville College and Director of Career Technical Education at Taft College. Dr. Aunai's leadership is defined by a commitment to shared governance, continuous improvement, institutional planning, and the implementation of actions focused on advancing student achievement. A champion for economic mobility and college access, he has worked to advance career and transfer preparation, the workforce through CTE, dual enrollment, and community partnerships. He holds a doctorate degree from California Baptist University.

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**Clint Cowden**

Candidate Forum: March 23, 2026, 9:00-9:45am, Room CIL 730

Live Stream: <https://taftcollege-edu.zoom.us/j/82683017825>

Recording: Link will be available at the end of Forums

Provide feedback: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ccowden>

Electronic feedback surveys will close at 8:30am on 3/24/26

Clint Cowden serves as Assistant Superintendent and Vice President of Instruction and Student Services at Palo Verde College, bringing 22 years of leadership experience in rural, Hispanic Serving Institutions. Currently overseeing approximately 80% of institutional operations, Clint is a fiscal strategist who has successfully aligned enrollment management with the Student Centered Funding Formula (SCFF) to ensure long term financial stability.

His leadership bridges academic and workforce development, drawing from previous roles as Dean of Career Technical Education at Hartnell College and Director of the Farm of the Future at West Hills College. An expert in accreditation and participatory governance, Clint champions equity for first generation and justice impacted learners. With a track record of managing complex budgets and building public private partnerships, he is committed to Taft College's mission of providing personalized student support and driving regional economic mobility. Clint holds a Master's degree from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

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Dr. Jerry Fliger

Candidate Forum: March 23, 2026, 3:15-4:00pm, Room CIL 730

Live Stream: <https://taftcollege-edu.zoom.us/j/88973132439>

Recording: Link will be available at the end of Forums

Provide feedback: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/jfliger>

Electronic feedback surveys will close at 8:30am on 3/24/26

Dr. Jerry Fliger is passionate about the role education can play in transforming lives. Jerry has over two decades in higher education as faculty, department chair, dean, vice president for instruction, and president. He is dedicated to improving access to high quality relevant education and increasing student success for all.

Jerry holds a bachelor's from Purdue-Fort Wayne in Interpersonal & Public Communication, a Master's from Miami University in Speech Communication, and a Ph.D. in Communication Studies from Bowling Green State University with an emphasis in Rhetoric and Culture.

Guided by a student-centered philosophy and an engaging leadership approach, he has led the development of several programs aimed at increasing career opportunities and academic advancement at the Hispanic and minority-serving colleges where he has served. Jerry believes in the mission of the comprehensive community college and the significant role that it plays in the economic development of the community and region.

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**Mike Giacomini**

Candidate Forum: March 23, 2026, 11:00-11:45am, Room CIL 730

Live Stream: <https://taftcollege-edu.zoom.us/j/85688609509>

Recording: Link will be available at the end of Forums

Provide feedback: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/mgiacomini>

Electronic feedback surveys will close at 8:30am on 3/24/26

A collaborative and student-centered executive leader, Mike Giacomini brings more than 25 years of experience in higher education finance, operations, and institutional leadership. Currently serving as Vice President of Administrative Services and Chief Financial Officer at Taft College, he partners closely with the Superintendent/President and Board of Trustees to oversee budgeting, facilities, compliance, construction, and long-range planning within a single-college district. His leadership is defined by transparency, shared governance, and a “team of one” culture that fosters accountability and trust.

Previously, he served as Chief Financial Officer for Kern Community College District and as a Campus President in private higher education, leading complex organizations through growth and change. He is recognized for strengthening fiscal stability, advancing innovative partnerships, supporting collective bargaining relationships, and aligning strategic planning with student success, inclusion, equity, and community impact.