Nov. 1, 2007
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Legislators, Educators Discuss the State of Education in California

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- Teachers are tired of selling candy to buy supplies and nailing plywood to classroom walls for make-shift lab tables, state legislators were told during a hearing held at Cal Poly.

Sen. Tom Torlakson, chair of the Select Committee on Schools and Community, hosted the informational hearing along with Sen. Abel Maldonado and Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee Oct. 30 in the Keck Laboratory on campus.

Designed to give a voice to classroom teachers, higher education, and business and industry, the hearing focused on creating learning environments for student success.

Comments from invited panelists and the public were presented. They included the following suggestions and remarks:

Jane Peterson, First Grade Teacher, Dana Elementary School: With hands-on projects about volcanoes and ladybugs, she motivates her pupils to become “totally committed to science and technology in the first grade.”

Luke Laurie, Science Department Chair, El Camino Junior High, Santa Maria: His concerns include the fact that some students first encounter science in high school, as well as the “long and winding road” federal funding take before reaching the classroom, and how standards-based instruction – or “drill and kill” – has harmed science education.

Bill Kurnett, Science Teacher, Del Oro High School: Rather than standards-based instruction, he recommends teaching students how to think and solve problems, because the world is changing so rapidly that no one can predict what “facts” students will need to know when they enter the work force.

Bonnie Konopak, Dean of the Cal Poly College of Education: Many science and math teachers in California lack subject-matter expertise for the areas they teach in and/or don’t even have a teaching credential. Cal Poly is promoting a “teacher-scholar” model that encourages teachers to spend time working at a national laboratory as scientists.

Peter Murphy, Executive Director, California League of Middle Schools: California needs a “seriously consistent funding approach that would ensure that every student has access to a high quality education.” The current competitive funding environment creates a “football season year round.” He suggests asking the state’s major businesses for funding to help ensure that the high-tech workforce pipeline is filled.

Leroy Tripette, Education Manager, Intel Corp.: There is not really a science rally point any more – no Sputnik or moon
shot. Maybe it’s clean, renewable energy. We should provide opportunities for students to showcase what they’re learning and doing.

James Boyle, United Launch Alliance: I was Principal for the Day for an elementary school. When aids came in with questions regarding finances, I asked them to explain how the school receives funding. There must have been 20-30 sources. Company and Air Force budgets aren’t that hard to manage.

Col. Carl Frushon, Vandenberg AFB Launch Facility: I remember watching, at age six or seven, Neil Armstrong landing on the moon. That was a huge motivator for me. Now I’m a rocket scientist.

Hank Lewis, Business Manager, IBEW Local 639: We’ve been training electrical contractors since 1942. Every year, we have fewer applicants passing the test. There is a 50 percent failure rate now, much higher than it was 10-15 years ago.

Sen. Torlakson: We need to find a way to tap into young people’s hopes and dreams, and we need to reprogram our existing funding before we ask the taxpayers for more. These hearings are helping us figure out how to do that. We want to understand the barriers and put together the best practices.

Sen. Maldonado: What we’re doing throughout the state is learning by hearing. We keep putting more money into education, but are we getting the results we want? We need to focus more on math and science.

Assemblyman Blakeslee: We need to capture the curiosity of a child and fan that flame into a fire of discovery. We want to motivate them to be the first person to see something under a microscope, through a telescope, or on a computer screen.

-- Leah Kolt, Public Affairs Director
Cal Poly

###