



## Post Webinar Plática\* Q&A with Sandra Varela of San Joaquin Delta College

\* Plática = talk, or chat

CLP hosted a series of webinars to support student services faculty, staff, and administrators at community colleges across California as they re-orient to providing services completely online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Find information about the series (and additional materials) at <https://www.careerladdersproject.org/problem-solving-moving-student-supports-online-a-clp-webinar-series>. Sandra Varela, a project director in the CalWORKS program at San Joaquin Delta College (SJDC), was one of the presenters. She oversees classified employees in her role.

Sandra Varela's [presentation](#) addressed using technology to connect with students on her campus through a variety of tools. We followed up with her to ask a few additional questions about the transition to online services for her students.

**CLP: At this time, is your campus offering job training for the CalWORKS participants and how is that working in a remote environment?**

**Varela:** Currently, the students that were enrolled prior to the campus closure all transitioned into online distance learning. The California Department of Social Services is providing all CalWORKS participants with good cause, so they are not required to participate in welfare to work activities right now. They can choose to continue with their education, but for now, they are exempt. Since the work requirement has been waived, most are continuing on with classes for the spring semester, and a good percentage have registered for summer online classes.

**CLP: Is there anything that you would like the broader community college community to know about classified staff and how they are working and adjusting to providing services remotely during the pandemic?**

**Varela:** The pandemic has been an opportunity for all of us to come up with innovative and creative ways to support each other and our students. We can look at the negative and focus on the obstacles that we are facing and also look at the silver lining in that it has forced us to get out of our comfort zone and look at different ways to support our students and to help each other. We have focused on various ways to use tech platforms to support and engage our students and connect them to the

resources that they need. And my team has been executing the delivery of our services online as best as they can, given the resources and circumstances.

I have to say that I'm really proud of our team and college. We have stepped up to the plate and faced this challenge head-on. It hasn't been easy, but we have managed to still provide a large percentage of what we are offering on-campus remotely.

**CLP: What have been the biggest challenges that you have encountered in supporting students from a distance?**

**Varela:** The lack of face to face contact, especially with our student population, has been one of the biggest challenges. CalWORKs recipients have struggled with transitioning to shelter in place and distance learning, and a lot of them lack resources, that's what we are hearing from our students. They are having a difficult time with technology, lack of childcare, need for counseling services, need for food, those are some of the barriers that our students are currently facing, which is why we are making a stronger effort to stay in contact with them with reminder messaging and social media updates. We are also increasing our case management efforts and increasing our outreach calls to stay in close contact with our students and let them know we are here to support them.

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