

Peer Review Team Follow-Up Report

College of the Desert
43-500 Monterey Ave.
Palm Desert, CA 92260

This report represents the findings of the Peer Review Team that conducted a follow-up visit to College of the Desert on April 6, 2026. The Commission acted on the accredited status of the institution during its June 2026 meeting and this team report must be reviewed in conjunction with the Commission's Action letter.

Dr. Tim Karas
Team Chair

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College of the Desert
Peer Review Team Roster

TEAM CHAIR

Dr. Tim Karas, Team Chair
Mendocino College
Superintendent/President

ACADEMIC MEMBERS

Ms. Davena Burns-Peters
San Bernardino Valley College
Academic Senate President, Faculty

ADMINISTRATIVE MEMBERS

Ms. Dorothy Battenfeld
Santa Rosa Junior College
Trustee

ACCJC STAFF LIAISON

Melynie Schiel
Vice President

Purpose of Follow-Up Visit

INSTITUTION: College of the Desert

DATES OF VISIT: April 6, 2026

TEAM CHAIR: Dr. Tim Karas

Purpose of Site Visit

The peer review team conducted its comprehensive peer review of College of the Desert from September 26-27, 2024. At its January 21, 2025 meeting, the Commission determined noncompliance with Standard(s) IV.C.2, Standards(s) IV.C.10, and Standard(s) IV.C.12, and acted to require a Follow-Up Report due no later than March 1, 2026, followed by a visit from a peer review team. Members of the peer review team conducted its follow-up site visit to College of the Desert on April 6, 2026.

The purpose of the visit was to verify that the Follow-Up Report prepared by the Institution was accurate, through examination of evidence, and interviews with Institution representatives, to determine if the Institution now meets the Standards noted in the following compliance requirements:

Standard IV.C.2 (Institution Requirement 1): In order to meet the Standard, the Commission requires that the governing board acts as a collective entity and that once the Board of Trustees reaches a decision, all board members act in support of board decisions.

Standard IV.C.10 (Institution Requirement 2): In order to meet the Standard, the Commission Requires that the Board of Trustees adheres to its policy on a regular evaluation that it uses the results to improve board performance, academic quality, and institutional effectiveness.

Standard IV.C.12 (Institution Requirement 3): In order to meet the Standard, the Commission requires the Board delegate full responsibility and authority to the CEO to implement and administer board policies without Board interference.

During the visit, team members met with approximately 10 administrators and trustees in formal meetings, group interviews, and individual interviews. The team thanks the Institution staff for hosting the site visit, coordinating meetings, providing additional documentation, and ensuring a smooth and collegial process.

Team Analysis of Institution Responses to Compliance Requirements

Standard IV.C.2 (Institution Requirement 1): In order to meet the Standard, the Commission requires that the governing board acts as a collective entity and that once the Board of Trustees reaches a decision, all board members act in support of board decisions.

Findings and Evidence:

Through district Board policy review process, the Board of Trustee approved revised Board Policies 2200 (Duties and Responsibilities) and Board Policy 2715 (Code of Ethics/Standards of Practice) in April 2025. BP 2715 establishes criteria related to the acting as a board of the whole. Specific language is: To clarify and reinforce that individual trustees may not act independently, the Board revised key policies:

- To base decisions upon all available facts in each situation, vote by honest independent conviction in every case unswayed by partisan bias, and abide by and uphold the final majority decision of the Board.
- An individual Board Member has no legal authority outside the meetings of the Board to direct staff, including the Superintendent/President, and should conduct relationships with District employees, students, local citizenry, and the media on that basis.
- Be aware that Board Members are responsible to all citizens of the District, and not solely to those who elected them. The authority delegated to the Board by the voters must be exercised with as much care and concern for the least influential as for the most influential member of the community.

The team confirmed that the Board has significantly improved adherence to their own policies related to acting as a collective entity. In review of board minutes and submitted evidence since the prior visit, the team found that the Board has increased the number of unanimous decisions reached through dialog and consensus building and split votes based on individual perspectives or opinions are rare. If there are split votes, the team confirms that members of the board have collectively supported the will of the board once the decision is final. Interviews with the executive cabinet members who interact directly with the board in closed sessions indicated healthy and appropriate discussions occur. In cases of split votes, the board is exiting the room in unity and in support of the board's decision.

In 2025, the Board engaged in several professional learning activities, including a livestreamed study session titled "The Role of the Board," facilitated by Liebert Cassidy Whitmore. In November 2025, the Board created a permanent Board Continuous Improvement Committee to oversee ongoing training, self-evaluation, and adherence to governance standards. The committee held the first meeting on January 14, 2026. and board membership was finalized at the January 22, 2026, regular board meeting. Evidence gathered during the site visit indicated positive impact resulting from the

Board Continuous Improvement Committee including ongoing and regular training for the board with follow up board retreats, and an established pathway to propose and develop future training and support for the board. In interviews, trustees indicated that training has improved the board's understanding of their role, the need for acting collectively, and the support of the campus CEO.

In May 2025, the Board conducted a self-survey which showed "Board adheres to a code of ethics" as the lowest-rated item. BP 2200 and BP 2715 were approved in April 2025. Based on the survey results and self-reflection, the Board planned the above-mentioned study session on the role of the Board. Following the study session, the Board create a continuous improvement committee, which first met in January 2026. Evidence indicates an intention to continuous improvement and to strengthen the Board working collaboratively as a unit and upholding Board decisions. The 2024 and 2025 Board Self-Evaluations noted similar areas for improvement related to board unity. The evidence illustrates that much of this work began in the previous twelve months. The Board is encouraged to keep the momentum on this self-identified issue.

Conclusion:

The institution has addressed the requirement and meets Standard(s) Standard IV.C.2.

Standard IV.C.10 (Institution Requirement 2): In order to meet the Standard, the Commission Requires that the Board of Trustees adheres to its policy on a regular evaluation that it uses the results to improve board performance, academic quality, and institutional effectiveness.

Findings and Evidence:

The Board approved Board Policy 2745 (Board Self-Evaluation) that outlines the process of their self-assessment in January 2025. Board meeting minutes reflect the Board conducted a self-assessment in April 2024. The self-assessment results indicated areas of strong agreement and areas of diverse opinions. Board unity and board policy responsibilities were identified as “areas of diverse opinions”.

In May 2025, the Board held a public study session retreat facilitated by the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), to review the self-evaluation findings. The two lowest scores were Board adhered to a code of ethics or standards of practice, and the Board’s relationship with the CEO. These findings mirrored the 2024 self-evaluation.

Two outcomes from the 2025 self-evaluation were to engage in targeted professional learning activities on the role of the board and to form a continuous improvement Board Committee. The board training happened in November 2025, and the first meeting of the board committee was in January 2026.

The team confirmed that the board is committed to regular self-evaluation and that the board has used the results of their evaluations for improvement. The next self-evaluation is scheduled during the months of April and May.

During the site visit the evidence presented was consistent indicating the positive impact of the establishment of the Board Continuous Improvement Committee, established self-evaluation cycles for the governing board with established pathways for identified areas of improvement to be addressed through additional training, both current and future, and continuous improvement. Governing board members consistently referenced the professional development opportunities, retreats, and workshops made available to and utilized by them in support of understanding and serving in their role. The self-evaluation process is expected to be followed, as established, into the foreseeable future based on the evidence gathered. During interviews, the preparation for the upcoming Board Self-Evaluation in May 2026 was referenced.

Conclusion:

The institution has addressed the requirement and meets Standard(s) Standard IV.C.10.

Standard IV.C.12 (Institution Requirement 3): In order to meet the Standard, the Commission requires the Board delegate full responsibility and authority to the CEO to implement and administer board policies without Board interference.

Findings and Evidence:

The Board of Trustees has adopted Board Policies to codify the delineation of authority between the CEO and the Board. The specific Board Policies are:

- Board Policy 2430 – Delegation of Authority to the Superintendent/President
- Board Policy 3100 – Organizational Structure (February 2026 revision)
- Board Policy 7110 – Delegation of Authority, Human Resources
- Board Policy 2200 – Board Duties and Responsibilities (April 2025 revision)

Collectively these policies entrusts the CEO with responsibility to administer the policies adopted by the Board; authorizes the CEO to establish organizational charts and delineate staff duties; assigns to the CEO authority for personnel actions; and clarifies that delegation of authority to the chief executive is a specific duty of the Board.

Evidence gathered during interviews, with executive members and governing board members alike, expressed confidence in the board supporting operational agenda items maintaining focus on policies. The appropriate delegation of responsibility and authority to the CEO was evident throughout the site visit and all interviews with training for the board, establishment of the Board Continuous Improvement Committee, established policies, understanding of roles, and communication being noted as the primary contributing factors supporting such delegation. Practices such as weekly CEO update to trustees, agenda review with board leadership, and agreed communication protocols between trustees, regular closed-session item pertaining to CEO performance, and the CEO codify and bolster the delegation of authority.

Conclusion:

The institution has addressed the requirement and meets Standard(s) Standard IV.C.12.