



# California's Voters Care About Higher Education

Change is overdue: California's next leaders must advance higher education policy



Experts agree that higher education has unmatched power to advance equity, individual prosperity, and economic growth. But California's leaders have let higher education policy slide for too long. Some important changes can close the workforce degree gap, create economic mobility, and build a data-driven and responsive platform to deliver the benefits of higher education to all Californians who want to learn, contribute, and succeed.

## Our higher education system must be:

**Coordinated:** California needs a statewide coordinating entity across higher education institutions to smooth student pathways and support degree completion. California is one of only two states without such coordination.

**Accessible:** We must develop reentry points for the millions of adults who have attended some college but have not completed their degree. Innovative practices can align college programs with workforce demands to connect students with training and hands-on experience for high-paying jobs.

**Transparent:** A statewide education data system will provide essential information for sound policymaking. To serve them effectively, we must know how our students move through all of California's education systems (P-20) and where they land in the workforce. It's time for California to apply tools of the digital age to make higher education responsive and meaningful.



The dark side of economic prosperity is that it has become almost synonymous with California's growing income inequality. Higher education, and the benefits that come with it, are the only durable way of addressing this inequality.



—Lande Ajose, PhD  
Executive Director  
California Competes

## Facts on California's higher education system

- » Nearly two-thirds (64%) of California's jobs in 2025 will require post-high school education.
- » A degree gap of more than 2 million threatens California's economic competitiveness. The creation of new jobs is outpacing the number of California workers qualified to fuel our innovation economy.
- » More than 4.5 million Californians aged 25–64 have attended some college but left before finishing their degree.
- » Beyond tuition, basic needs keep many students in California from finishing college. According to the UC and CSU systems, 40 percent of their students are food insecure.

## California's voters want change.

Univision's Political and Advocacy Group, in collaboration with California Competes and Media Predict, conducted a **2018 statewide survey** of registered voters intending to enroll in college within two years and their parents, and found:

- » 60 percent or more of potentially college-bound voters and their parents say their 2018 vote will be influenced by how candidates address higher education.
- » 75 percent or more support the next Governor making college affordability a priority.

Further, according to **PPIC's 2017 Statewide Higher Education Survey**, half of likely voters (51%) believe major changes are needed in California's education system, and 80 percent of Californians say the state's higher education system is very important to the future quality of life and economic vitality of the state.

## What are notable California civic leaders saying about higher education?

**"Addressing inequities in our education-to-employment pipeline will help make the ideal of the California dream accessible to all. If you care about California's economy, you must care about the people who fuel our economy. Higher education is the key to moving our society toward a future where anything is possible."**

**–Ashley Swearengin**

Member, California Competes Leadership Council and CEO of Central Valley Community Foundation

**"Our economy depends on higher education opportunity. When qualified students are deterred by cost, housing, and transportation barriers, and lost in the labyrinth of an uncoordinated higher education system, our state loses its greatest economic resource – the talent of our young people."**

**–Libby Schaaf**

Member, California Competes Leadership Council and Mayor of Oakland

**"A comprehensive data system is critical to achieving transparency in California's education system. We must understand our students' journeys from high school through college or career training and into the workforce. By doing so, California's economy would benefit from more graduates in less time, with more completed degrees and certificates."**

**–Elizabeth Hill**

Chair, California Competes Leadership Council and Former Legislative Analyst for the State of California

**"California leaders have failed to adequately fund and redesign our public higher education system to meet the needs of our state's economy. Unfortunately, this has meant that many promising students have not been served. They've been denied the social mobility they deserve, which, if given, could lift up entire communities."**

**–Jack Scott**

Member, California Competes Leadership Council and Former Chancellor of California Community Colleges

## About California Competes

California Competes: Higher Education for a Strong Economy is a nonprofit, nonpartisan project funded solely through support from philanthropic foundations. We focus our higher education work at the intersection of equity and economic growth, because in our richly diverse state, we cannot thrive without both being present.

To learn more, we invite you to read California Competes' seminal reports on the degree gap, inequities in higher

education and workforce success, and the need for a coordination and oversight for higher education:

- » **Mind the Gap: Delivering on California's Promise for Higher Education**
- » **Opportunity Imbalance: Race, Gender, and California's Education-to-Employment Pipeline**
- » **Charting a Course: State Leadership in Higher Education**

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