



# Clear Accountability

## California's community colleges need streamlined management

To maintain California's strong economic position, the state needs the innovation and high productivity that comes from a well-educated workforce. For California to remain competitive and become a leading degree-producing state by 2025, it will need to produce an additional 2.3 million postsecondary credentials on top of the 3.2 million that are already projected to be produced under current policies.

Reaching that goal would require an estimated increase in degrees of more than four percent each year. California will be able to reach the goal, with high quality, only if its colleges and universities operate with clear purpose and improved efficiency.

With the largest community college system in the world, California sends more of its high school graduates to community colleges than any other state. At the same time, students at California's community colleges have among the lowest rates of success of any two-year college system in the country. Only three out of ten students who intended to earn a degree or transfer were able to do so within six years. Improving

outcomes at community colleges could address a third to half of the 2.3 million additional graduates that California needs between now and 2025.

The system will only be able to improve when leaders have the tools to make decisions and to implement them in a timely manner. Structures and rules at the state and local level are preventing good management and getting in the way of student success. The financial pressures faced by the state's community colleges underscore the need to improve management so that every penny in the system is used well. Effective governance strengthens the case for additional resources.



## Give leaders the responsibility and the tools to manage the system effectively

Even though the community college system is essentially funded at the state level, the local college districts operate as 72 separate entities but with the ability to spend taxpayer dollars but little accountability for results.

This has resulted in the system not working well for students, preventing them from getting the classes they need and resulting in costly delays in completing their degrees. To compensate for the resulting quagmire, the Legislature has instituted a bevy of rules and regulations to bring some rationality to the system.

Yet this legislative micromanagement has restricted the ability of the colleges to improve over time and limited the ability of college presidents to spur innovation on their campuses. The governance and management structure of the community colleges must be reconfigured to provide colleges with the structure and flexibility they need to be responsive to current conditions. The role of the statewide Chancellor's office—including the Board of Governors, the Chancellor and the Chancellor's key staff—must be elevated to assume greater leadership responsibility and accountability for the community college system's share of statewide goals for higher education.

As recommended by the Student Success Task Force and the Little Hoover Commission, the system office should be independent of the Governor's administration to empower it to establish policy directives and hold colleges accountable for meeting goals, similar to the California State University system. The members of the Board of Governors, and the Chancellor they hire, should be responsible and held accountable for distributing funding in a way that achieves the state's goals: equitable access in all regions of the state with the support students need to make progress toward job readiness or transfer. This will require elimination of much of the micromanaging requirements in the California Education Code.

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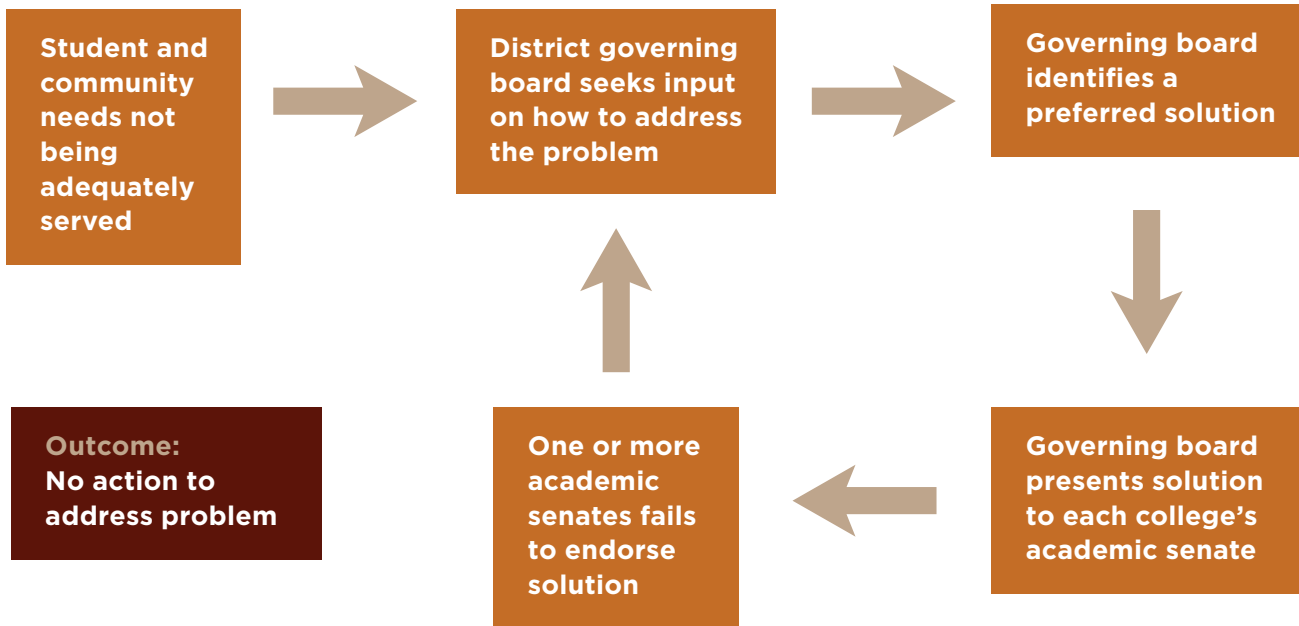
## **Ensure that local leaders are clearly accountable**

In any high-functioning community college, the board of trustees and administrators involve students, staff and especially faculty in helping to identify and solve problems.

By seeking input, the leaders of the institution gain critical insights about the severity of a situation, the opportunities and challenges ahead, and the potential policy changes that could address the situation. The process leads to more fully considered actions, and builds confidence across the institution that all perspectives were considered.

In 1988, as part of a broader effort to update laws that affect community colleges (popularly known as AB 1725), a provision was adopted requiring community college districts to engage in this type of consultation. The mandate was fairly simple, calling for local districts “to ensure faculty, staff, and students the right to participate effectively in district and college governance, and the opportunity to express their opinions at the campus level and to ensure that these opinions are given every reasonable consideration.”

## How local community colleges get stuck in endless meeting loops



The idea was to create an expectation for effective management practices that engages faculty, staff and students in positive and productive ways, while maintaining the leadership role of the duly elected local boards of trustees and the administrators they appoint. In implementing the new requirements, however, the statewide Board of Governors adopted regulations that turned a consultation requirement into a requirement for “mutual agreement” between governing boards and academic senates. This vested academic senates with the formal power to prevent and stall progress on many district and college policies. The regulations have, in effect, bestowed decision-making authority upon academic senates without creating the commensurate processes for holding them accountable to the public for the decisions that are made (and not made).

This extreme presumption in favor of the status quo, and in favor of 50%-plus-one of voting faculty members, stands even if the policies are inimical to the interests of current students, potential students, the

community and taxpayers. In one district, the lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities created constant disagreements about how to reach decisions: instead of taking a few months to develop a strategic plan the process took two and a half years. Meanwhile, students were not being adequately served. It leaves college leaders to wonder, “What would the public say if they knew how much it was costing? Would we lose the public trust if they knew?”

California law relies on locally elected boards of trustees to ensure that the community colleges “advance California’s economic growth and global competitiveness through education, training and services that contribute to continuous work force improvement.” A strong faculty is critical to that goal, but institutional control by unelected, unaccountable faculty councils is inconsistent with good management. The statewide Board of Governors should amend its regulations to restore clear accountability to local boards of trustees and to the administrators who report to them.

## Policy Details

California’s community colleges have been stymied by a system of management that is not enabling the colleges to make needed improvements. There needs to be greater consistency between the decision making of local boards and the community college system’s policy and performance priorities. Restructuring the management of the community college system will provide for clearer accountability and allow for more local flexibility.

### **Increase Independence and Responsibility of the Board of Governors:**

The system office of the California Community Colleges should be established as an independent and autonomous entity, like the California State University system office, with responsibility for and authority over the entire community college system. The newly configured system office, guided by the Board of Governors, would be responsible for:

- Articulating statewide objectives for the system and establishing the data systems for monitoring progress and needs;
- Establishing a comprehensive finance policy for the system, including submitting a single budget to the Legislature;
- Instituting unified policies on articulation and transfer, class content and standardized placement tests;
- Allocating resources to each district based on criteria established by the Board of Governors;
- Reviewing major financial commitments made by local districts;
- Developing system-wide human resources policies and parameters for collective bargaining;
- Establishing performance agreements with each district; and
- Considering and granting waivers of regulatory and statutory provisions that prevent innovation and improvement in student success.

### **Clarify Responsibility of Local District Leaders:**

Current regulations require district governing boards to either turn decision-making authority over to the academic senate on a wide range of matters, or to reach “mutual agreement” with the academic senate in order to change any policy. This requirement cuts students, staff and the local community out of the process and makes it impossible to hold governing boards accountable. The statewide Board of Governors should amend the regulations so that local district governing boards are required to seek input from the faculty, from relevant staff, from students, and from the community.

# California Competes

Higher Education for a Strong Economy

In the second half of the twentieth century, California emerged as an economic powerhouse, the envy not just of other states but of nations. The future of every Californian is dependent

on maintaining that leadership by developing the talent and productivity of Californians through higher education, the keystone of California's diverse economy.

Our colleges, universities and professional training programs have provided the intellectual and technical know-how to make California a hub of innovation and job creation. To remain competitive, we must create better pipelines from the opportunity of college and professional training to advancement in good-paying jobs. We can secure a stronger economy by building a talent pool whose creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship and industriousness match the needs of the 21st century.

Opportunity, creativity, enterprise, efficiency and growth are the hallmarks of economic development and the lens through which California Competes develops non-partisan and financially pragmatic recommendations to improve postsecondary education.

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## STAFF

Robert Shireman  
*Director*

50 California Street, Suite 3165  
San Francisco, CA 94111  
Phone: (415) 343-0830  
Fax: (415) 543-0735  
info@californiacompetes.org  
www.californiacompetes.org

Lande Ajose  
*Deputy Director*

Remmert Dekker  
*Program Associate*

This report is available on our website.

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