

Reimagining Higher Education to Serve All Californians

How the state can seize pandemic-driven disruption to drive economic strength and advance equity



The COVID-19 pandemic has opened a window of opportunity for California's higher education system to innovate and correct pervasive inequities. While the state responds to the crisis and works to rebuild, it must restructure postsecondary education to be more efficient, resilient, and just. Achieving the five key goals below will advance the state's ability to grow even stronger than before and allow its richly diverse communities to thrive.

Keys to Unlocking Economic and Social Mobility

Higher Education and Workforce Alignment

- » Engages employers
- » Regional approach
- » Career-ready students

College Access and Success for Adults

- » Student-centered structures
- » Multiple paths to earning credit
- » Increased affordability

Quality Online Education

- » Effective pedagogy and delivery
- » Clear cost structures
- » Broadband access for all

Coordinated Policy Setting

- » Leverages data to project state needs and set goals
- » Connects programs and services with shared missions
- » Led by an impartial and transparent government entity

Data for Education and Employment

- » Actionable insights for evidence-based policymaking
- » Integrated, longitudinal, individual-level data
- » Covers early childhood through workforce

Higher Education Alignment with Workforce Needs

During the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic recession, Californians with postsecondary awards have fared much better than those without college credentials. Moreover, these college-educated Californians have helped buoy the state's economy due to their sustained employment and higher earnings. California should:

- » Develop local and regional compacts that authentically engage employers in postsecondary planning and delivery.
- » Support higher education's ability to align programs to state, regional, and local economic and community needs.
- » Promote strategies that deepen student learning, career awareness, and job readiness, like work-based learning and actionable labor market information.

Postsecondary Access and Success for Adults

California's economic health depends on closing its college credential gap. This gap of over 2 million certificates, associate's degrees, and bachelor's degrees cannot be addressed by focusing only on recent high school graduates. To make college a reality for more adults by offering clear pathways to and through higher education, California should:

- » Award credit for prior learning more consistently.
- » Expand the use of competency-based education.
- » Reform financial aid to encourage enrollment and completion by adults, such as accounting for the total cost of attendance and removing age-based eligibility requirements.
- » Promote flexible course scheduling.
- » Improve pathways into postsecondary education, including admissions and remediation.

Effective and Accessible Online Education

Prior to the pandemic, online learning had been slow to take hold in California public higher education. However, online education has the potential to address some of higher education's biggest challenges: access for students who need more course flexibility, campus capacity issues, and long-run pressure on stressed postsecondary budgets. To promote the accessibility and effectiveness of online education, California should:

- » Ensure that all Californians have reliable broadband connections.
- » Learn from existing models of high-quality online courses and programs to promote equitable access and success.
- » Leverage gains made from the nearly universal remote learning driven by COVID-19.
- » Clarify online education cost structures to recognize their unique elements compared with in-person courses and programs.

Coordinated Policy Setting Across Segments

The pandemic underscores the need for statewide policy setting to address challenges facing California college and university students. Even before this crisis, volatile economic changes, cost increases, and a postsecondary structure struggling to serve today's students stretched our higher education system to the breaking point. To ensure postsecondary institutions work together to advance statewide goals, California should:

- » Harness the momentum of the Governor's Council for Post-Secondary Education by advancing objective and transparent coordination that prioritizes equitable student outcomes while balancing institutional needs.
- » Leverage data to project state needs, set targets, and advance intersegmental coordination.
- » Connect programs and services with shared goals to promote efficient and effective delivery

Comprehensive Education and Workforce Data

An effective higher education system requires an evidence-based approach driven by a comprehensive, reliable data system. Currently, limited institutional and student data are available to understand the state's progress toward addressing the degree attainment gap and develop policies to close the gap. For the Cradle-to-Career Data System to advance meaningful change that will benefit Californians everywhere, California should:

- » Swiftly develop and launch the Cradle-to-Career Data System.
- » Include individual-level early childhood through workforce data in the data system.
- » Ensure the data system, including its governance, promotes equitable policymaking and practices.
- » Commit adequate and stable funding to ensure its use and success.

About California Competes

California Competes: Higher Education for a Strong Economy is a nonprofit, nonpartisan project funded through support from philanthropic foundations and is led by Executive Director Dr. Su Jin Gatlin Jez.



Mission and Vision

California Competes: Higher Education for a Strong Economy aims to solve the state's thorny social and economic problems by conducting rigorous higher education and workforce policy research. Through our research, we guide decision makers in developing and implementing policies that bolster equity so every Californian can engage, contribute, and succeed.

We envision a California where our state and regional economies and communities thrive, fueled by equitable and racially just postsecondary and workforce outcomes.



Leadership Council

California Competes benefits from our highly respected, bipartisan Leadership Council that provides breadth and depth of expertise and leadership.

- » **(Chair) Elizabeth Hill**, former Legislative Analyst for the State of California
- » **Aída Álvarez**, chair, Latino Community Foundation; and former administrator, US Small Business Administration
- » **Christopher Cabaldon**, Mayor-in-Residence, Institute for the Future; interstate higher education commissioner; former vice chancellor, California Community Colleges
- » **Carl A. Cohn**, professor emeritus, Claremont Graduate University; former member, State Board of Education; and former executive director, California Collaborative for Educational Excellence
- » **Steven Koblik**, former president, Huntington Library; and former president, Reed College
- » **Carol Liu**, former state senator (D)
- » **Julia Lopez**, former president and CEO, College Futures Foundation
- » **Lenny Mendonca**, former chief economic and business advisor for the State of California
- » **Roger Niello**, co-owner, The Niello Company; and former state assemblymember (R)
- » **Kristin Olsen**, partner, California Strategies; chair, Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors; and former assembly minority leader (R)
- » **Libby Schaaf**, mayor, City of Oakland
- » **Jack Scott**, former chancellor, California Community Colleges; former state senator and assemblymember (D); and former president, Pasadena City College
- » **Peter Weber**, founder of Fresno Bridge Academy; and former Fortune 500 executive



California's postsecondary system must seize this opportunity to transform in the face of crisis and power the state's economic recovery by equipping Californians with the skills they need to endure and thrive. Evidence-based policy changes can pave the way to a better future for us all.



–**Elizabeth Hill**

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

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