

# Reimagining Higher Education to Serve All Californians

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

The pandemic-driven changes have opened a window of opportunity for California's higher education system to innovate and correct pervasive inequities. While the state works to adapt and rebuild, it must restructure postsecondary education to be more efficient, resilient, and just. Achieving the four 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

- » Flexible, student-centered structures
- » Multiple paths to earning credit
- » Increased affordability



### Effective and Quality Online Education

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



### Coordinated Policy Setting and Implementation

- » Leverages data to project state needs and set goals
- » Prioritizes equity and student outcomes
- » Successful launch of the Cradle-to-Career Data System

## Higher Education Alignment with Workforce Needs

During the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic volatility, 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. To strengthen connections between higher education and economic development, 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 access to 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.
- » Promote flexible course scheduling.
- » Improve pathways into postsecondary education, including admissions and remediation.
- » Address the unique needs of student parents.

## Effective and Accessible Online Education

The pandemic has driven a realization that digital modes of learning are in high demand and can be strategically leveraged to build stronger pathways to education and career opportunities. Online education can 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 expand the transformative potential 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 and Implementation

Given the complexity of California's higher education landscape, the state must connect programs and services to weave resources together and effectively execute its policies and innovations. Even before the pandemic, 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 institutions, programs, and services work together to advance statewide goals, California should:

- » Harness the momentum of the Governor's Council for Post-Secondary Education by creating an objective and transparent coordinating entity that prioritizes equitable student outcomes while balancing institutional needs.
- » Connect programs and services with shared goals to promote efficient and effective delivery.
- » Launch the Cradle-to-Career Data System so that it promotes equitable policymaking and practices.

# About California Competes

California Competes: Higher Education for a Strong Economy is a nonpartisan policy and research organization focused on identifying solutions to the state's most critical challenges at the intersection of higher education, equity, and the economy. The organization is led by CEO Dr. Su Jin Jez.



## Mission and Vision

California Competes works to transform the state's higher education system into an engine of economic opportunity that empowers all Californians, particularly those from underserved communities, to achieve their full potential. 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.



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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 Board of Directors and former Legislative Analyst for the state of California

To learn more about California Competes and our priorities for California's future, we invite you to visit our website and follow us on social media.