

## *Access & Equity Policy Brief*

### *Community Colleges Offer Best Solution for Growing Crisis of Undereducated Young Californians*

#### **Introduction**

California is home to over three million 18–24 year olds, and their numbers are growing. In fifteen years, we can expect a 51% increase in this college-age cohort. This diverse group of young women and men are the parents of a new generation and they will soon become our leaders, tending to the needs of the very young and the elderly in communities across our state. The educational and vocational opportunities they are afforded today will soon affect all Californians.

The good news is that many of these young adults have greater educational aspirations than their predecessors. They mirror nationwide trends demonstrating that 88% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders expect to go on to post-secondary education. However, their aspirations do not match their outcomes. While some young adults experience a smooth pathway into and through higher education, many others do not realize their dreams. They are disengaging from our educational systems and facing seriously curtailed life options. Millions of our young Californians lack the knowledge, skills, and credentials to succeed in higher education and our changing labor market. The education pipeline into both higher education and the workforce is broken.

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#### **contents**

- Growing Crisis of Undereducated Youth
- Growing Drop Out Problem
- Immigrant Undereducation
- Graduated but Underprepared
- The Community College Solution
- Recommendations



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## About California Tomorrow's Community College Access & Equity Initiative

Founded in 1984, California Tomorrow is a non profit organization that has built a strong body of research and experience supporting individual, institutional, and community change work around matters of diversity and equity in: public schools, community building organizations, family serving institutions, early childhood programs, philanthropy, and the after school/youth development arena.

California Tomorrow works with a diverse cross-section of community, civic, campus, system, and policy leaders to increase access and equity in California community colleges. We are focused on three areas of work: **Public Education and Advocacy** efforts in which we provide briefings, presentations, and workshops to share our research and policy recommendations with a wide range of state policymakers, community and civic leaders, and community college leaders; a **Campus Change Network** to provide support to teams of campus leaders (presidents, faculty, staff, students) who are working to enact access- and equity-related reforms; and **Alliance Building** to facilitate and strengthen connections among community college access and equity advocates, the leaders of educational equity and civil rights organizations, and workforce development and business leaders.

In 2003, California Tomorrow released *California's Gold: Claiming the Promise of Diversity in Our Community Colleges*, a comprehensive study that examines how diverse students are faring in the state's community colleges. In addition to identifying promising instructional practices and support strategies for increasing access and success among our most vulnerable students, the study also identifies the challenges facing campus and system leaders who are working to ensure the state can keep its promise to provide accessible and equitable higher education for all Californians.

### Acknowledgements:

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According to the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (2000) in California, for every 100 students who enter 9<sup>th</sup> grade, only 70 graduate from high school in four years. And of those 70 high school graduates, only 37 enter college, only 25 are still enrolled in college after sophomore year, and only 19 earn a degree within six years of entering college. Disproportionately, these patterns impact low-income people, communities of color, and immigrants. According to a recent Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy Report, among California's 18-24 year olds, 60% of Asian & Pacific Islanders and 43% of Whites are enrolled in college while only 32% of African American and 22% of Latino 18-24 year olds are enrolled in college.<sup>1</sup> Because those young people who are least well-served by our education system are also the fastest growing segment of this age population, without immediate and sustained leadership this crisis can only get worse.

Fortunately, there is one institution uniquely positioned to address the academic preparation of this group and to propel them along pathways to college degrees and vocational certifications — the California Community College System (CCC). California's investment in creating the largest and most comprehensive community college system in the nation means there is a viable alternative. Community colleges provide an affordable, open-access gateway to higher education. They are a way back into school for discouraged learners and drop-outs, a pathway into higher education for the underprepared, and a means of vocational preparation for all. But as the demand for enrollment increases dramatically to accommodate a huge influx of new students and as budget woes continue to force a variety of short-term focused cuts in our educational systems, the survival and effectiveness of community colleges have become seriously threatened.

Fixing California's educational pipeline so that it can meet the needs of undereducated youth and help us produce an educated and skilled citizenry and workforce will require that we simultaneously strengthen both our K-12 public education system and the CCC. Yet our funding mechanisms and political process pit the two systems against each other. The solution lies in equity-focused reforms of both systems, with specific attention to the relationship and transitions between these two vitally important educational institutions.

1 Shulock, Nancy & Colleen Moore. *Variations on a Theme: Higher Education Performance in California by Region and Race*. Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy, Sacramento, CA, June 2005.

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*"Many academic, business, government, and community leaders are deeply concerned about the drop-out crisis in California's public schools, particularly in inner city racially segregated districts. In Los Angeles the crisis has reached epic proportions, as we are witnessing alarming rates of disengagement from education as early as middle school. Today, there is an urgent need for a more accurate portrait of the dropout problem in order to identify promising points of intervention. Both the symptom and cause must be well understood and treated. Effective strategies to re-engage and support our youth are desperately needed, and community colleges will need to be a central element of our efforts to repair the failing educational pipeline."*

— Dr. Julie Mendoza, UC ACCORD



Recently released policy reports and studies have encouraged the development of strategies for regional collaboration between the K-12 system, community colleges, and four-year colleges and universities. This makes sense. As such regional planning efforts take place, it is essential that space is made for the participation of educational equity advocates, particularly those with youth and adult constituencies that are most directly impacted by the issues presented here. Equally essential is the commitment to develop recommendations and plans that are based on data and analysis regarding the various challenges and barriers these Californians face. Policies must be based on those strategies and resources that have proven to increase success for the students in most urgent need.

Our ability to “college-educate” this diverse group of Californians will determine both their individual economic prospects and our state’s overall economic strength. This “Access and Equity Policy Brief” examines the challenges we face in halting and reversing the crisis of undereducation among young Californians. The brief provides data and analysis that community, civic, and policy leaders can use to better understand the cracks in our current educational pipeline and the promising solutions that the community colleges offer. Finally, in this brief we offer recommendations to address the obstacles and barriers community college leaders are facing as they work to strengthen and expand access and success for our most vulnerable students.





## Part I: A Growing Crisis of Undereducated Youth

Today one million 18–24 year old Californians (about 30%) do not have a high school diploma. A very close association exists between education and employment. High school drop-outs are four times more likely than college graduates to be unemployed. In 2000, the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University found that 638,000 of these 16–24 year olds were out of school and also jobless. Even when employed, high school drop-outs earn only 70% of what graduates earn. The U.S. Census estimates that a high school drop-out will earn \$270,000 less than a high school graduate, over her/his working life.<sup>2</sup> As more and more jobs require some kind of post secondary training, the earning gap between school drop-outs and young people with some form of college credential will grow even larger.

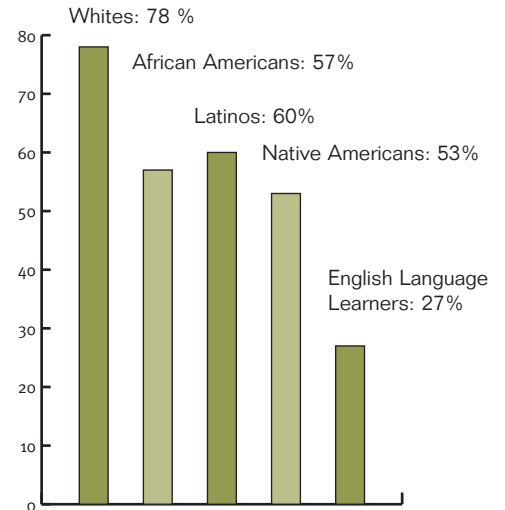
### Growing Drop-out Problem

California ranks 45<sup>th</sup> among the 50 states in terms of graduation rates. As several recent studies have demonstrated, our state's pronounced graduation gap is characterized by race, class, and immigrant status. According to the Urban Institute, while 78% of White students graduate from our high schools, only 57% of African Americans, 60% of Latinos, and 52% of Native American students graduate. Meanwhile, at 54% and 50% respectively, the graduation rates for young men in the Latino and African American communities are even more alarming. According to a recent study by the Harvard Civil Rights Project, less than two-thirds of all students graduated from high schools in central city districts and in communities that suffer from high levels of racial and socio-economic segregation.<sup>3</sup> Of the English Language Learners who even reach high school, an estimated 27% make it to graduation.

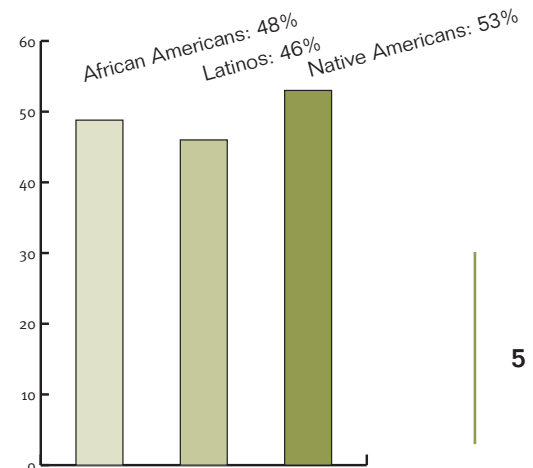
2 Orfield, G., Losen, D., Wald, J., & Swanson, C. *Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth are Being Let Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis*. The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, March 2004. Contributors: Urban Institute, Advocates for Children of New York, and The Civil Society Institute.

3 Harvard Civil Rights Project. *Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis in California*. The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, March 2005.

### High School Graduation Rates



### Male High School Drop Out Rates



### Urban School Districts

Graduation rates in individual districts and schools – particularly those with high concentrations of students of color — remain at crisis-level proportions. According to Professor Robert Balfanz of Johns Hopkins University, African American and Latino students are three times more likely than White students to attend a high school where graduation is not the norm and where less than 60% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders obtain diplomas four years later.

According to Dr. Julie Mendoza of UC ACCORD, only 43% of all 9<sup>th</sup> graders who entered the Los Angeles Unified School District's high schools in Fall 2000 were enrolled three years later. The majority of these 26,000 students are African American and Latino. Their exodus from school is especially pronounced between grades 9 and 10.

This pattern is not unique to Los Angeles. According to Ed Trust-West, African American and Latinos in the Oakland Unified School District have 46% and 37% graduation rates respectively.



## Immigrant Undereducation

Not all young people without high school diplomas are drop-outs. We are an immigrant state and immigrants arrive in the United States at all ages. Those who come to this country as adolescents sometimes never enroll in U.S. schools. A great number of young immigrants work to support their family in the precarious economic situations so many face. Some have completed the minimum years of schooling required in their country of birth (e.g., 8 years in Mexico) but face large gaps in academic preparation for high school in the United States that cannot be overcome within the structures of our high school curriculum. Others enter the United States already older than the age of compulsory school attendance here, or have been denied or discouraged from enrollment in high school because of their age. While there is no exact count of this population, almost one third of this age group (18–24 year olds) who spoke Spanish at home had never enrolled in a U.S. school (compared to 8% of Asian language speakers).

For those who do enroll in secondary schools, high school policies and the traditional structure of secondary education make it particularly difficult for immigrant adolescents to attain a high school diploma. The lack of bilingual courses that would enable students to pursue high level academic courses before they are proficient in English means that those without sufficient English skills cannot access or succeed in high school academic classes. Gate-keeping tests offered only in English make it difficult for immigrants to demonstrate what they know and to earn a high school diploma. The result is academic failure, and a larger number choosing to abandon school. This cycle fuels the disproportionately high drop-out rates and tremendous rates of undereducation among young immigrant women and men.

*“We’re concerned about the high drop-out rate in California and the large number of young people who just disappear from schools. And we know that the High School Exit Exam will make the drop-out rate worse, not better. We need to fix the public schools in this state so they engage and really educate our students, and be sure that the community college system remains an open door back into education for those who were failed in the K-12 system.”*

— Solomon Rivera, Executive Director, Californians For Justice

## Graduated but Underprepared

The crisis of undereducation among young adults in California is only partly due to drop-outs and those who never enrolled. Every year, a majority of young people who graduate from high school have completed the general education requirements without getting the preparation they need to succeed in college. In fact, only one in five graduates has met the A-G course requirements students must pass in order to be eligible to qualify for admission to a four year public university in California.

Low-income students and students of color overwhelmingly attend secondary schools with significantly fewer resources than wealthier, predominantly White suburban schools. Schools with high concentrations of students of color and language minority students disproportionately have insufficient numbers of books for students, fewer qualified teachers, and problems with inadequate ventilation, leaks in ceilings, malfunctioning or non-existent air-conditioning, and broken toilets. They have fewer laboratories for studying college preparatory science and fewer counselors to provide information that first-time college-goers might need to plan a course of study for college enrollment (the counselor ratio

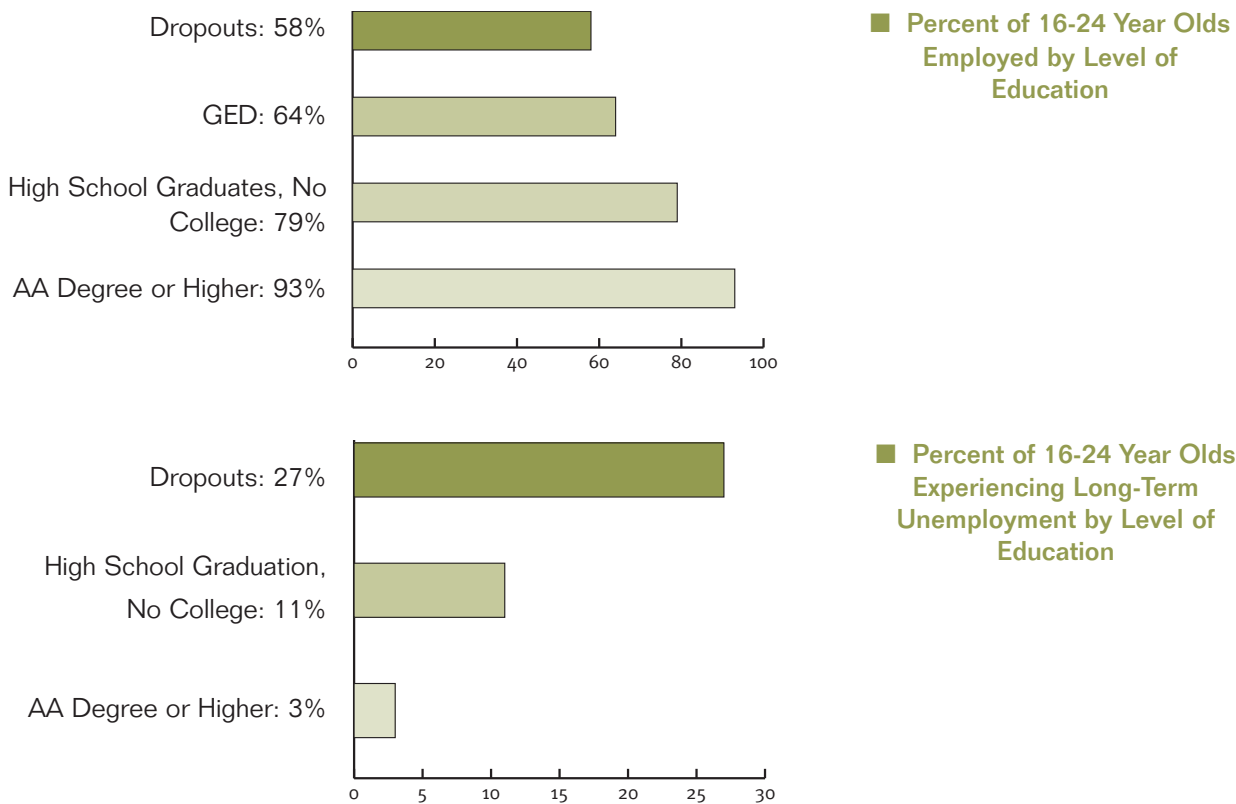


is now 1:1900 in many urban districts). All of these inequities, compounded by pervasive low expectations and lack of attention to the specific needs of groups like English Language Learners, add up to a high school diploma that, for many students, doesn't actually prepare them for higher education.

### GEDs Are Not Enough

Though some of these young people who drop out or never enroll in high school eventually will get a GED, we know that fewer than 18,000 GEDs were awarded last year. The vast majority of our young men and women remain without diplomas. The 3.1% ratio of GED awards to those with less than a high school education (18–24) places California 49<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states on this measure.

Even the GED does not provide a sufficient solution. Recent research by Russell Rumberger of the University of California, Santa Barbara, suggests that a high school equivalency diploma does not yield the same benefits as a high school diploma. A GED certificate gives workers significantly more earning power if it is combined with some post-secondary training and education. However, a GED alone produces only small improvements in earnings. For example, drop-outs — even those who later get a GED — tend to experience long periods of unemployment.<sup>4</sup> In 2000, a time of very low unemployment in the country, only slightly more than half of drop-outs were employed at any given time.



Source both : Wald, Michael & Martinez, Tia. *Connected by 25: Improving the Life Chances of the Country's Most Vulnerable 14-24 Year Olds*. Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA. November 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Wald, Michael and & Martinez, Tia. *Connected by 25: Improving the Life Chances of the Country's Most Vulnerable 14-24 Year Olds*. Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA. November 2003.



## High School Exit Exam Will Add to Crisis of Undereducated Youth

As of 2006, all students will be required to pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) in order to earn a high school diploma, whether or not they have attended schools that provide the opportunities and supports to learn the material in the exam. Aligned with content standards, the hurdle it poses to graduation is not high — an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level in math and a 10<sup>th</sup> grade level in English-language arts. That minimum achievement standard is well below the academic preparation our young men and women will need to succeed in 21<sup>st</sup> century California. The CAHSEE floor is nowhere close to the academic mastery students need to successfully complete the A-G course requirements. This level of preparation is also far below the basic knowledge and skill level youth will need to successfully develop the competencies business leaders expect from entry-level employees. That is, even students who succeed in passing the CAHSEE will not necessarily be prepared for the post-secondary education or careers they desire.

Right now, almost one million 18–24 year old Californians lack high school diplomas. All indications show that holding the Class of 2006 to the CAHSEE requirement will increase this problem. Based on the results of early testing in 2004 and 2005, the California Department of Education indicates that 12% of the State’s Class of 2006 will fail either the English-language arts or mathematics section of the exam. Researchers at UCLA/IDEA predict that the failure rates will be closer to 20% for English-language arts and Mathematics.<sup>5</sup> Whatever the percentage actually ends up being, an independent evaluation conducted for the California Department of Education has concluded that close to 100,000 seniors will not receive diplomas this year — because they have not passed CAHSEE.

Meanwhile, the numbers from the 2004 and 2005 tests also confirm that the failure rate for CAHSEE will disproportionately impact students of color, immigrants, and special education students (see chart). The numbers for Special Education students who were unable to pass either the English-language arts or mathematics sections of the exam were so high — nearly 50% — that the State has agreed to postpone implementation of CAHSEE for Special Education Students.

CAHSEE Failure Rates Based on 2004 and 2005 Tests<sup>6</sup>

| Sections of Exam      | African Americans | Latino | ELL Students | Special Education Students |
|-----------------------|-------------------|--------|--------------|----------------------------|
| English Language Arts | 18 %              | 29 %   | 40 %         | 46 %                       |
| Mathematics           | 24%               | 30 %   | 39 %         | 49 %                       |

<sup>5</sup> Rogers, John, et al. *More Questions than Answers: CAHSEE Results, Opportunity to Learn and the Class of 2006*. UCLA/IDEA, Los Angeles, CA, April 2005.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*





Considering that these numbers measure a failure to achieve a minimum standard that is below what students need to succeed in society, the picture early CAHSEE results paints of California students' academic preparation should be cause for deep concern.

### The High Price of an Undereducated Generation

Income and education are more closely linked today than at any other time in our history. Whether young people have dropped out or disappeared from high schools, never enrolled at all, or received a diploma without having received the education they need, undereducation has a high price. Economic success and full participation in our democracy, as well as access to family-supported jobs and/or vocational training, require education beyond high school.

*"Our education system was designed to meet the needs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial economy, a dramatically different world than the one we inhabit today. It is hard to see how we will meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge economy without improving the effectiveness of our pipeline from high school through college."*

— Job for the Future

This is a crisis of equal opportunity and future options for the millions of young people who are undereducated in our state. But it is also a crisis for the future of our state overall, particularly in light of the rapidly changing demographic make-up of our workforce. According to research conducted by the California Budget Project, in just 15 short years 70% of California's prime age workforce (25–54) will be non-White. Additional data and challenges associated with our under-prepared adult workforce are discussed in a forthcoming California Tomorrow policy brief. California's long-term economic well-being is dependent on the leadership steps taken today to radically improve educational outcomes for young Californians.



## Part II: Community College Solution

The CCC is the only system of higher education that has the mission, the enrollment policies and the characteristics to meet the needs of the undereducated young adult population in our state. The 109 community colleges in our state offer this diverse and underprepared group the kind of support and flexibility they require to move forward with their education. Community colleges can offer students multiple pathways to success, provide students with comprehensive support, and have begun innovative partnerships with high schools and middle schools. In this next section, we describe these three strategic factors — multiple pathways, comprehensive support, and innovative partnerships — that make community colleges so important to the state’s efforts to turn around educational outcomes for young women and men.

*“Our Statewide advocacy for educational equity and our recent historic settlement in Williams v. California to ensure the most basic resources for the most underserved students underscores the important role community colleges must play in California’s educational pipeline. As we work to ensure resources and teaching in K-12 schools are organized to provide all young people with a real opportunity to succeed academically, we are counting on community colleges to provide important bridges into higher education.”*

— Liz Guillen, Director of Legislative and Community Affairs, Public Advocates

### Community Colleges Offer Multiple Pathways to Success

Unlike other institutions of higher education, community colleges both provide college-level academic pathways and serve as an essential system of workforce preparation for those entering the labor force. Community colleges serve as “transfer” institutions, providing the first two years of a four-year college program with college-level classes that are equivalent to what students would receive at a four year public college and/or university. For students not prepared for such classes, community colleges provide basic education in developmental reading, writing, math, and science programs that serve as pathways to college-level instruction. They also offer English as a Second Language classes. In addition to these academic gateway classes, community colleges have well-developed career and technical education programs that can result in occupational certificates or degrees.

Collectively, these multiple opportunities are critical to students’ success. They are not just parallel functions but permeable pathways that enable students to successfully pursue multiple goals simultaneously. Most vocational paths require some academic college-level work: a student who first enrolls in order to complete a vocational certificate may also begin amassing the college-level credits necessary to transfer to a four year institution. Or a “transfer” student set on an academic track may find that the vocational courses the community college offers may help her develop the marketable skills that will pay for the four year college or allow her to support her family while she takes classes.

These multiple pathways are especially crucial for immigrants. They are a reason the community colleges have been able to play a key role in educating immigrants, who are 20% more likely than native-born students to attend community college.<sup>7</sup> The combination of English as a Second Language courses, aca-

<sup>7</sup> Szelenyi, K., & Change, J.C. “ERIC review: Educating Immigrants: The Community College Role,” *Community College Review*, Volume 30, No. 2, pp 55-73, Raleigh, NC, Fall 2002.



ademic remediation, and vocational preparation give such students the extra “time in education” to learn English and amass academic credits that the inflexible high school structure does not allow.

Offering multiple pathways poses a complex and difficult challenge to the community college system, and there are areas that need strengthening. But the idea of multiple pathways offers the kind of solution to California’s undereducation crisis that the state needs.

## Gateway Basic Skills are Critical to the Success of Multiple Pathways

Upon taking community college placement exams, a majority of our young Californians find that they are academically unprepared for college-level work. For those who dropped out of high school or never had enrolled at all, this may not be surprising. But according to the Legislative Analyst’s Office, today more than 40% of recent high school graduates who enroll in California community colleges also find they need basic skills remedial courses. And at some campuses, as many as 70% of high school graduates are in need of remediation.<sup>8</sup> State-required placement tests show that many recent high school graduates enrolling in community colleges need to repeat high school courses in basic English reading and writing and mathematics. In urban community colleges, three in every four new students take at least one remedial course. This need for remediation disproportionately impacts Latinos and African Americans (22% are “college ready” compared to 32% overall).

Students who were unable to obtain a high school diploma in the K-12 system have another chance in the community colleges, where they can attain a GED and take basic skills classes to prepare for college-level work. Meanwhile, community colleges such as Cuyamaca College, Grossmont College, Mesa College, Mira Costa College, Miramar College, Palomar College, San Diego City College, and Southwestern College are developing curriculum for dual enrollment programs to help high school students prepare themselves for the CAHSEE exam.

While basic skills classes are sorely needed, according to a recent scan conducted by the Research and Planning Group, success rates in basic skills courses is mixed. Success rates in basic skills classes are around 60% compared to 70% completion rates in other courses. Meanwhile success rates in gate-keeping courses that lead to transfer are lower still. For example, the statewide success rate for those who enroll in elementary algebra is about 50%; meanwhile success rates for Latino and African American students are 47% and 40% respectively.<sup>9</sup> Overall, many students do not reach their original goals by the end of six years after enrollment in community college — particularly those who attend part time because they need to work.

Community colleges are currently working very hard to turn these statistics around. To improve outcomes, leadership and investments at the campus and state level are needed to strengthen developmental education. Because of the high demand for these courses and a funding formula that funds them at lower levels than the “college credit” courses, basic skills and academic remediation courses are often overcrowded. In many cases, the teaching is often ineffective, using the same pedagogy



8 Woodlief, Blaze, et al. *California’s Gold: Claiming the Promise of Diversity in Our Community Colleges*. California Tomorrow, Oakland, CA 2003.

9 The Research and Planning Group, Center for Student Success. *A Summary of Key Issues Facing California Community Colleges Pertinent to the Strategic Planning Process*. The Research and Planning Group, July, 2005.



that didn't work for students when they were in high school. While many faculty members are succeeding in efforts to incorporate new and effective teaching approaches, too many still rely on the same basic "drill and kill" pedagogy that these students encountered in their K-12 experiences.

At campuses that are succeeding in improving educational outcomes for underprepared students, professional development for instructors, supports to work collaboratively in developing the curriculum, and efforts to strengthen the articulation between developmental courses and regular or college-level courses have been found to be very effective in improving the quality of teaching and learning in basic skills courses.

## **Vocational Education is Critical to Success in Multiple Pathways**

The crisis of under preparation among young Californians applies to workforce preparation as well as preparation for college. Most high school graduates enter the workforce without any direct vocational training, relying on their high school diplomas and high school education as a sufficient foundation for entry-level jobs. The number of vocational courses offered by high schools has dropped sharply over the past decade and such courses appear to offer only short-term value to students in the form of increased employment and wages.

A 2004 survey of almost 1500 high school graduates and hundreds of employers of high school graduates found that two in five of those surveyed report there are gaps between the education they received in high school and the overall skills, abilities, and work habits expected of them in college and in the work force.<sup>10</sup> Employers reported an identical pattern — they said that 39% of recent high school graduates are unprepared for the expectations that they face in even entry-level jobs, and they estimate that an even larger proportion (45%) are not adequately prepared for the skills and abilities they need to advance beyond entry level.<sup>11</sup>

Because of their comprehensive nature, community colleges are well poised to meet the needs of these students. Unlike high schools, community colleges across the state are able to offer a wide variety of academically rigorous career and technical programs that are geared to preparing people for high-demand, high-wage occupations in fields such as nursing and biotech. In addition to the diversity of programs offered through community colleges, a unique feature of many occupational programs is the intentional integration of a career ladder designed to assist students to see clear pathways to job advancement and wage progression. Furthermore, there is a movement within community colleges to create better linkages between occupational courses and other academic disciplines to further enable students to pursue not only viable career pathways, but advanced educational pathways as well.

Community colleges' success with their vocational programs shows up in students' earnings gains. Students completing one-year vocational certificate programs experience long-term earnings gains of about 10% compared to the average earnings of high school graduates. A two-year vocational degree increases long-term earnings by almost 40%. Seventy-five percent of students who enroll actually complete the programs, and 80% of those get jobs within six months and hold those jobs for a year or more.

10 Hart, Peter D. *Rising to the Challenge, Are High School Graduates Prepared for College and Work? A Study of Recent High School Graduates College Instructors and Employers*. Peter D. Hart Research Associates/Public Opinion Strategies, Washington, D.C. February 2005.

11 *ibid.*



## Community Colleges Offer Open Access and Comprehensive Support

With the bold mission of open access, community colleges historically have served as a central – and often the only – bridge to opportunity for Californians who would otherwise not have access to higher education. In addition to serving the college transfer population, the community colleges are a way back into education for those who have no high school diploma. As the most financially accessible institution of higher education in the state, community colleges are the primary pathway for low-income and first-generation college-goers. By offering support programs, community colleges help students negotiate pathways through higher education. For all these reasons, the community colleges serve as the main gateway into higher education for people from the demographic groups that have traditionally been least well served by K-12 and have faced the greatest barriers to schooling – communities of color, immigrants and low income communities.

### Engaging Young Californians

In the past year, 1,206,418 young women and men (ages 16–24) enrolled in California’s community colleges. About 150,000 of them are recent high school graduates who began pursuing higher education directly after high school. Most were in the “general track” curriculum in high school, without the courses to satisfy the A-G requirements for entrance into a four year university. For immigrants, this figure is higher — one out of eight immigrant community college students don’t have diplomas.

As the most financially accessible institution of higher education in the state, community colleges have become the primary pathway for low-income and first-generation college-goers in the state. Seventy-five percent of African American, Latino, and Native American first-time college freshman in the state are enrolled in community colleges. More than 35% of high school graduates in California who eventually earn a four year college diploma started their undergraduate education at a community college.

A look at CCC enrollments for young people in one semester demonstrates the diversity and extent of their presence in the system.

#### One Semester, 2003-2004

|              | Asian          | Hispanic       | Black         | Native American | Other non-White | White          | Declined to State | Total per age cohort |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| 16-17        | 20,651         | 30,689         | 8,976         | 884             | 2,595           | 41,533         | 9,379             | 114,707              |
| 18-19        | 72,944         | 132,233        | 30,351        | 3,155           | 9,073           | 153,105        | 25,141            | 426,002              |
| 20-24        | 124,198        | 205,720        | 46,532        | 5,309           | 15,338          | 225,916        | 42,696            | 665,709              |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>217,793</b> | <b>368,642</b> | <b>85,859</b> | <b>9,348</b>    | <b>27,006</b>   | <b>420,554</b> | <b>77,216</b>     | <b>1,206,418</b>     |
|              | 18%            | 31%            | 7%            | 1%              | 2%              | 35%            | 6%                | 100%                 |

Source: California Community College Chancellor’s Office.





## Comprehensive Support Programs

Community college campuses (at least until recent budget cuts curtailed them to a large degree) differ from high schools by being able to offer a range of services beyond the classroom to support students. Some services — general counseling, tutoring, transfer centers — are available to all students, while others only serve small numbers, either because of their criteria for participation or because of limited funding. But support programs and services have played a vital role for those who are able to utilize them — particularly first generation college-goers without families able to help them negotiate pathways through higher education; low-income students in need of financial aid and ways to combine work and college; and immigrant students for whom the foreign system and lack of proficiency in English make it particularly difficult to figure out what is expected and how to negotiate their way through the college systems.

The most effective support programs appear to be those that are the most comprehensive, including counseling, tutoring, childcare, financial aid, closer relationships to staff, and strong peer support. Currently, these comprehensive programs are offered primarily to focused cohorts of students, such as the Puente, Mesa, and CALWORKS programs. While these program interventions reach relatively few students, the notion of “one stop” comprehensive support centers is particularly appropriate for immigrants and other underprepared students. Many young students are unsure of their educational goals. This is not surprising given their age, but it means they need career counseling as well as academic counseling.

These support services should be expanded. Too often, however, comprehensive support services are underfunded and institutionally marginalized and are the first victims of budget cuts. An agenda to support 16-24 year olds in making the transition to adulthood must include continued investment in these services.

## Community Colleges are Engaged in Innovative Partnerships with K-12 Education

Across the nation, efforts to develop new models and approaches for the transitional ages 16 – 24 have resulted in innovative partnerships between K-12 and community colleges. Bridge programs, pre-community colleges, blended institutions, active outreach between high school counselors and community college staff, jointly run college awareness programs, special financial aid and scholarship supports, and other innovations cross the traditional boundaries between secondary and postsecondary institutions. Several California community college campuses have implemented these new models, seeking to engage high school students in college-level work and to ensure smoother transitions between the two systems.

### Early Outreach Programs

Recruitment and outreach from community colleges to the high school population and through community-based organizations where drop-outs may be reached is absolutely critical to serving the population of undereducated youth. Drop-outs, discouraged learners, and immigrants are particularly “out of the loop” of information about community colleges — outside of institutions, outside of networks of information, and without guidance, they are largely uninformed or misinformed about access to and costs associated with community colleges.



## **Making a Difference: Cabrillo Advancement Program**

The Cabrillo Community College (CAP) Program outreaches and provides scholarships to high-risk junior high school students. Cabrillo is located in Santa Cruz County, which has a significant percentage of disadvantaged and low income youth. The CAP program brings these students to the Cabrillo College campus every year to become acquainted with the college, to get support for their academic school work, and to begin to build relationships with CCC staff.

The CAP program features comprehensive support, beginning with a counselor who mentors these students, walking them through the education pipeline. Other important support services include academic and career counseling, Saturday college readiness workshops, and after school tutoring by Cabrillo College alumni as well as students from the University of California, Santa Cruz, who also serve as role models to CAP students.

The CAP program also reaches out to parents to help them learn how to support their children through school and into college; creates a network of peers that also become additional supports for CAP students; and finally, provides a \$1000 scholarship upon graduation from high school and enrollment in college.

The program's success rests on its vision and effective collaboration between Cabrillo Community College, the Cabrillo College Foundation, and strong partnerships with local schools. Today, the program has expanded into nine schools, five middle schools, and four high schools. Since its founding, the program has awarded 613 scholarships and has consistently demonstrated that CAP student cohorts have remarkably high rates of high school graduation. Currently, data shows that about 25% enroll at Cabrillo College, 25% go directly to a four year university, and most of the remaining students graduate from high school but do not immediately pursue higher education.

For more information about the program contact Elizabeth Dominguez, CAP Counselor/Coordinator at (831) 479-6526 or e-mail [eldoming@cabrillo.edu](mailto:eldoming@cabrillo.edu).

### Sources:

California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Office

California County Data Book, 2001, Children Now

California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Office

## **Joint Enrollment**

Some community colleges assign full-time community college instructors to teach college-level courses to high school students on a high school campus, with the salary paid by community colleges.

Dual or concurrent enrollment programs between high schools and colleges have been an option in California for a long time for those high school students ready to take on college-level work. Such programs can offer advanced students an accelerated career path or an academic headstart on college as a fast track alternative to the traditional high school senior year. They also, however, can prove useful to those high school students who find themselves missing one or two units necessary



for high school graduation (often a situation for immigrant students) — such students can use non-credit classes on community college campuses in the evenings or summers to assist them in amassing credits to graduate from high school.

In 2003-2004, high school students accounted for about 28,600 community college full-time equivalent students; of this total, vocational courses accounted for 15% of the instructional time while the other 85% represent courses in academic subjects. The largest number of high school students concurrently enrolled in non-credit courses at community colleges are taking elementary and secondary basic skills and classes in the health and safety and short-term vocational instructional categories.

### Middle Colleges

Interest in combining high school and community colleges has been present for a long time, but has more recently been given a boost through major private foundation investments. Several years ago, Jobs for the Future established a national Early College High Schools Initiative to create national models for a four to five year course of study that would lead to both a high school diploma and an Associates degree. Their goal has been to provide personalized, coherent education and meaningful credentials that would set young people on a path to success in work, college, and life.

Some, but not all, of these middle college programs are based on community college campuses. The location on a college campus encourages high school students to have a future orientation – and often enhances the resources of the high school. Intensive guidance is built in, and the curriculum

is designed to integrate high school and college study into an articulated program. Some reach down into middle schools by starting with the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and providing extensive support, thus ensuring that students are ready for college-level courses when they get to high school.

These middle college models are primarily designed for students who are underrepresented in postsecondary education — students who have not had access to the academic preparation needed to meet college readiness standards and for whom the cost of college is prohibitive. By changing the structure of the high school years, compressing the number of years to a college degree, and removing financial and other barriers to college, early middle colleges have the potential to improve high school graduation rates and better prepare traditionally underserved students for family-supporting careers.

#### The Los Angeles Trade Tech Community College

Introduced in California in the late 1980s, the Los Angeles Trade Tech middle college is built on a three way partnership between the community college, California Academy for Liberal Studies (an early college charter high school), and the National Council of La Raza. It offers a grade 6 –12 early college model — by the time students graduate grade 12, they have earned enough credits to qualify for sophomore standing at a UC or CSU campus and will have fulfilled all of the UC admissions requirements. They can also opt for a 13<sup>th</sup> year option to complete the requirements for an Associate of Arts degree at LATTC where they are enrolled in dual enrollment college courses.



## Part III: Recommendations

A policy agenda designed to help California's young women and men transition into higher education and the workforce must include a commitment to maintaining those elements of community college structures that are designed specifically to make higher education accessible to this population: multiple pathways across programs, comprehensive support, and course delivery that is flexible around the needs of a community. This policy agenda should also serve to simultaneously reform and strengthen K-12 education and community colleges, and ensure that promising collaborations between the two systems are expanded. To succeed, this kind of policy reform agenda will require greater leadership, collaboration, and innovation. It will also depend on visionary policymakers who work to ensure investments in public education are commensurate with the task at hand.

However, today California's community colleges are dangerously and damagingly underfunded. According to a recent study by the Public Policy Institute of California, California ranks 45<sup>th</sup> in the nation in per student funding for community college students. The CCC is the least well funded of all levels of public education, receiving 75% less funding than the UC system, 50% less funding than the CSU system, and less funding per student than K-12 education. While Proposition 98 provides a basic guarantee of funding, it also pits community colleges against K-12 schools because the two systems share the same pot of resources. Meanwhile, since the early 1990s, community colleges have given up nearly \$4 billion in resources originally promised in Proposition 98.

Finally, during difficult budget periods, the elements and structures that allow community colleges to successfully serve our most vulnerable students tend to be the first to go when community colleges are faced with the hard choices of what to cut. When budget cuts hit, community college leaders across the state struggle to protect the essential supports highlighted in this brief (basic skills courses, counseling, vocational programs, ESL courses).

As a result, the college students in California who need the most are actually receiving the least. Larger class sizes mean students have less access to faculty and help. Overcrowding and cuts in course offerings means growing numbers of students aren't able to take the courses they need – which means that some students may fall through the cracks and not complete their educational aspirations. And every increase in fees (even those that appear small to policymakers) results in some students becoming unable to complete their education. Community college students are challenged by multiple obstacles, working, juggling family responsibilities, and being unprepared for college-level work. Making one factor more difficult could make a difference between having or not having the capacity to pursue and be successful at completing a higher education plan.

Stabilizing funding to ensure community colleges do not lose more ground is a good step; but it is not sufficient to address the crisis of undereducation outlined





in this policy brief. The desire for and, therefore, demand for higher education in California is increasing at the same time that undereducation and lack of preparedness of the young people in the state is growing. Demographic projections of growth in the 16–24 year old cohort, more stringent requirements at CSU/UC that will push more and more qualified students to the community colleges for their higher education, and the implementation of CAHSEE will result in more (not less) K-12 student drop-outs. It is estimated that over the next 5–10 years, the higher education system will need to absorb at least 700,000 more students, mostly in community colleges. This unprecedented growth in the college age population will continue to create pressure for scarce resources in the state’s education systems.

Unless these daunting funding challenges are addressed at the system level, many students will be precluded from access, and those who are able to attend will find themselves with fewer resources to guide their progress. The funding inadequacies and inequities must be addressed if our community college system is to make good on the promise of open access that offers low-income, undereducated young adults pathways into higher education and the labor market.

Now is not the time to move backward. Our state’s educational pipeline can be repaired so that young Californians can successfully achieve their higher education goals. Toward this end, we offer the following recommendations:

- State policymakers should provide the leadership and resources needed to simultaneously reform and strengthen community colleges and K-12 education. State leaders should ensure that educational equity advocates, particularly those with youth and adult constituencies that are most directly impacted by the crisis of under education are active participants in the development of solutions.
- State policymakers should address inequitable and inadequate funding formulas to ensure support for community colleges is commensurate with the urgent societal task they are undertaking.
- State policymakers should work with community college leaders to develop a sustainable finance approach that ensures community colleges can offer the instruction and support services that have proven to improve academic success for the most vulnerable students.
- State policymakers should expand and strengthen the capacity of community colleges to partner and collaborate with K-12 schools through innovative programs such as those highlighted in this brief.
- State policymakers and business and community leaders should come together to build support for implementation of priority strategies in the new strategic plan for the CCC system (for more details, see [www.ccc-systemstrategicplan.org](http://www.ccc-systemstrategicplan.org)). The strategic plan rightly calls for system and campus leadership to strengthen basic skills education and coordination between basic skills, academic and workforce programs, and essential student support services for our most vulnerable students. It also calls for campus leadership to improve coordination between the basic skills, academic, workforce development, and support services programs students need to move successfully through the multiple pathways described in this brief.
- State policymakers should work to ensure that community colleges receive resources that will be needed to strengthen faculty professional development and create curriculum that accelerate and moves students into the high-level critical thinking, reading, and writing skills required for college-level courses.





## Conclusion

Increasing the rates of student success in community colleges is an essential public investment. Funding the community colleges will improve economic security, increase civic participation, and increase college completion rates for economically disadvantaged students and students of color. It is urgent that we do so — for their well-being and our own.

In California’s current public policy climate, the broad mission (vocational and academic) and survival of the community college is threatened by insufficient attention, only partial support for its broad mission, and inadequate investment. Over the past several years, budget cuts have decimated vocational programs, ESL, support programs, and the evening and weekend classes that provide the flexibility that is so important for access. In short, cuts have struck the very programs identified as needed particularly for the undereducated youth population. This short-sighted policy is taking California further and further from the kind of investment in human development and human capital that is needed for a strong economy, a thriving democracy, and our ability to be an equitable and diverse state.

It’s time for a long-view. California once prided itself on having one of the best educational systems in the nation. California once saw itself as a forward-thinking and future-building state. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain by investing anew in our education systems.

### ■ The Array of Higher Education Benefits

|                 | Public  | Private   |
|-----------------|---|---|
| <b>Economic</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased Tax Revenue</li> <li>Greater Productivity</li> <li>Increased Consumption</li> <li>Increased Workforce Flexibility</li> <li>Decreased Reliance on Government Financial Support</li> </ul>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher Salaries and Benefits</li> <li>Employment</li> <li>Higher Savings Levels</li> <li>Improved Working Conditions</li> <li>Personal/Professional Mobility</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Social</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced Crime Rates</li> <li>Increased Charitable Giving/Community Service</li> <li>Increased Quality of Life</li> <li>Social Cohesion/Appreciation of Diversity</li> <li>Improved Ability to Adapt to and Use Technology</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved Health/Life Expectancy</li> <li>Improved Quality of Life for Offspring</li> <li>Better Consumer Decision Making</li> <li>Increased Personal Status</li> <li>More Hobbies, Leisure Activities</li> </ul> |

Source: Institute for Higher Education Policy. *The Investment Payoff: A 50-State Analysis of the Public and Private Benefits to Higher Education.* Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education. February, 2005.



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*"For me, the educational institution that merits attention to meet the needs of disconnected youth is the community college. It's located within commuting distance of most individuals, provides a vast variety of offerings through public funding, already serves a bridge function in allowing individuals who enroll for some purposes to continue for other goals, and leads not only to certificates and degrees of its own — it also provides access to the mainstream of the education system and the baccalaureate degree. For these youth, the high school has been a failure; public four year colleges are way out of reach. The community college is the beset candidate for creating a system of opportunities for disconnected youth."*

— W. Norton Grubb, *School of Education, University of California, Berkeley*

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