



# RECOVERY WITH EQUITY

A ROADMAP FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AFTER THE PANDEMIC



# Table of Contents

<b>3</b>	<b>Foreword by Dr. Lande Ajose</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Taskforce Members</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Executive Summary</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>The Recovery with Equity Taskforce</b>
<b>23</b>	<b>Recovery Framework</b>
<b>25</b>	<b>Key Research Findings</b>
<b>34</b>	<b>Taskforce Recommendations</b>
37	Fostering Inclusive Institutions
44	Streamlining Pathways to Degrees
52	Facilitating Student Transitions
58	Simplifying Supports for Student Stability
<b>66</b>	<b>Next Steps</b>
<b>71</b>	<b>Endnotes</b>
<b>76</b>	<b>Acknowledgements</b>
77	Working Group Members
78	Stakeholder Participants
82	Focus Group Participants
83	Technical Advisors
<b>84</b>	<b>Appendix</b>
85	Recommendations at a Glance
86	Taskforce Equity Framework
87	Related Reports

## Foreword by Dr. Lande Ajose

### CALIFORNIA FOR ALL CALLS US TO REACH HIGHER



Since the global pandemic struck, Californians, and the institutions that serve them, have been grappling with serious challenges—like how to manage grave health risks and ramifications, as well as frightening financial uncertainty. The national public health emergency that has wracked our economy has also revealed and intensified long-standing inequities across California, including deep disparities by region, age, race, and ethnicity in employment and in higher education.

Student success in higher education is critical to the health of our state and regional economies. But like most of California's economy, nearly every aspect of post-secondary teaching, learning, and campus life has been impacted by the global pandemic and recession. We need to ensure that California's systems of higher learning fully recover and thrive, and that while planning for this recovery, our students remain our number one priority. Their success is inextricably tied to the future of California.

Long before the pandemic, it was clear that too many California students face structural barriers that limit their opportunity to earn a college degree. Such barriers include the total cost of attending college, the time it takes to complete a degree program, and uneven access to college prerequisites. Historic inequities make these obstacles steeper for students who are Black, Latinx, Asian Pacific Islander, or Indigenous. The pandemic magnified stresses for students, leading some to stop out, drop out, and underperform, as mental health and other challenges became more acute. As a result, far too many are not realizing their goal of earning a degree, at the same time that California needs more college graduates to provide the workforce talent to meet future economic demands.

To fulfill the vision of California for All we can and must do better.

For this reason, together with the Governor's Council for Post-Secondary Education, I convened the Recovery with Equity Taskforce, a set of state and national experts in higher education and innovation, and asked its members to recast today's challenges as an opportunity to help California's economy recover with a post-secondary ecosystem that is more equitable, more resilient, and more coordinated.

Grounded in the conviction that equity in higher education is essential to a stronger California for All, the Taskforce set out to generate equity-driven, student-centered strategies, policies, and practices with a shared aim: to help California's post-secondary institutions emerge from the pandemic stronger and better poised to serve all students.

The Taskforce sought input from a broad swath of students and K–12 and post-secondary educators, as well as leaders in civic organizations, local governments, nonprofits, and workforce development. Many of the challenges they worked to address did not start with the pandemic, but the health crisis provided the opportunity to re-envision what's possible, and address new urgent issues of concern and those that have needed attention for a long time. This report seeks to address not only the realities students and institutions will face on the other side of the pandemic, but also what it will take to re-engage those students who have sidelined their academic and career ambitions amid extraordinary stress.

The Taskforce identified recommendations to advance four guiding principles:

- **Fostering Inclusive Institutions:** Institutional cultures and approaches to teaching and learning that work for all learners, especially those left behind.
- **Streamlining Pathways to Degrees:** An integrated statewide system for admission and transfer to provide clear, easy-to-navigate pathways to degrees.
- **Facilitating Student Transitions:** High-touch, high-tech guidance and improved academic preparation for college access and success.
- **Simplifying Supports for Student Stability:** Resources and structures packaged and simplified to help students meet basic, digital, and financial aid needs.

The recommendations supporting each of these principles are interconnected and together provide a roadmap for California's education systems, policymakers, business leaders, and philanthropic institutions as they plan for the short- and long-term economic needs of our state.

These approaches are intended to elevate the number and diversity of Californians who earn a degree, with a focus on improving outcomes for Black, Latinx, Asian Pacific Islander, Indigenous, and adult learner students who disproportionately have been denied opportunity and access to higher education. Doing so is essential to our commitment to equity that will strengthen California communities and the economy for generations to come.

The content of this report should be considered in context: Seven other recently published reports and an eighth, which is forthcoming, recommend steps to rebuild California's economy, strengthen critical economic sectors, and improve how we nurture and educate learners of all ages (see page 87 for a list of these reports). A common throughline of this body of work is the role of colleges and universities in driving recovery and prosperity. Woven together, these reports inspire a tapestry of reforms that will make California stronger across all regions and economic sectors. California also benefits from a new era of partnership with a federal administration that is aligned in its commitment to build back better with equity at the core of its agenda.



While the roadmap presented here by the Recovery with Equity Taskforce is bold and far-reaching, it is important to note that it does not address every critical issue that California students face. Unpacking and addressing college affordability and broader issues related to public higher education finance, for example, are largely outside the scope of this report. These topics remain an important area for additional reform.

Nor is this roadmap a to-do list for one leader or one institution. Rather, it is a call to our higher education segments and institutions to take strong action that will require coordination and collaboration across segments and within each region of our state. Post-secondary system leaders have an important implementation role, with progress on many fronts requiring collaboration with California's students, faculty, K–12 system, political leaders, the business community, and philanthropy. The imperative to recover from crisis provides a critical opportunity to act upon these recommendations to rebuild a more equitable higher education system that benefits all Californians.

I sincerely thank the esteemed state and national experts in higher education and innovation who served on the Recovery with Equity Taskforce over the past six months. I am grateful to the many students and leaders who shared their perspectives and suggestions to enrich the quality of this report and its recommendations—I am motivated and inspired by your insights. I thank Education First for supporting the Taskforce in research, exploration of solutions, report writing, and project management. I also extend my deep gratitude to College Futures Foundation for its support of the Taskforce and the production of this report.

During the presidential inauguration earlier this year, National Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman urged Americans toward a better future in her poem “The Hill We Climb,” saying: **“We will not march back to what was, but move to what shall be.”** In this spirit our state will move toward our moonshot goal of eliminating equity gaps and charting a new trajectory toward a California for ALL.

*Dr. Lande Ajose is the senior policy advisor for higher education for the Office of Governor Gavin Newsom. She leads the Governor’s Council for Post-Secondary Education and chairs the Recovery with Equity Taskforce.*



# Taskforce Members

The California Higher Education Recovery with Equity Taskforce was convened to envision a new approach for California's post-secondary preparation and workforce readiness. It was established in August 2020 by Governor Gavin Newsom's Senior Policy Advisor for Higher Education, Dr. Lande Ajose, in consultation with the Governor's Council for Post-Secondary Education. The Recovery with Equity Taskforce comprised California and national experts in higher education equity and innovation and was chaired by Dr. Ajose.

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## Vision for the Future of California's Post-Secondary System and Workforce

California has long been known for its strong and innovative economy, demographic diversity, and enviable quality of life. The state's rich and diverse environment—from mountains to deserts to farmland to beaches—makes it one of the most popular places to live. But the true value of California lies in its people.

**California succeeds when it builds fully on the talents, creativity, and energy of its people.** Many have contributed to and benefited from what the Golden State has to offer, but there is work to do to ensure that the opportunity for success and economic mobility is equitable and available to all.

The global coronavirus pandemic has had devastating health and economic consequences for the people of California. It has exacerbated existing employment and wealth gaps, food and housing insecurity, and inequality of digital access. All of this change has occurred in the midst of our nation's reckoning over systemic racism.

**It is critical to chart a course to a new day when all Californians can actively participate in helping our state thrive.** What is the best route to that future? Preparing everyone with the training and education necessary to engage in the high-quality, in-demand jobs that will drive a recovering, vital economy.

**The current rate of educational attainment in California is insufficient to meet workforce needs.** Most of the fastest-growing high-quality jobs in the state require post-secondary education, and there are significant gaps in educational attainment by race/ethnicity and geographic region.<sup>1</sup> Low-income, first-generation, Latinx, Black, and Indigenous students—who make up most of the student population in California's public high schools—are less likely than their peers to finish high school, complete the A–G coursework necessary for admission to the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU), enroll in college, and graduate from college.<sup>2</sup> Coastal regions far exceed inland regions in percentage of residents with post-secondary degrees; this trend mirrors economic disparities between the coastal and inland regions.

California has the **fifth highest unemployment** in the nation.<sup>20</sup>

San Joaquin Valley and Imperial Valley experience **depression-level unemployment, at 29% and 27% respectively.**<sup>20</sup>

Black and Latinx residents face disproportionately **high unemployment rates, at 8.2% and 7.9% in 2020,** compared to 7.0% total unemployment that year.<sup>8</sup>

**99% of the Black labor force** with a high school degree or less **filed for unemployment in 2020.**<sup>10</sup>

The pandemic has exacerbated these problems. Many Californians are choosing between feeding their families and incurring the real costs of pursuing degrees that could change their futures for the better. While virtual instruction presents an opportunity to significantly expand capacity, it also presents an array of challenges, including access to necessary technology, quality of online teaching, and lack of necessary personal and academic support. In addition, out-of-work adults often have trouble finding post-secondary programs with the kind of intensive, just-in-time approach and support they need to quickly retrain for different industries and get back on their feet. With families sheltering at home, students of all ages learning virtually, and many out of work or underemployed, participating in post-secondary education is an increasingly difficult choice to make.

The result? Many Californians are choosing not to re-enroll in programs they have already begun or not to enter post-secondary education at all. Fall 2020 post-secondary enrollment dropped by 6.1% in California compared with fall 2019, far worse than the national one-year enrollment decline of 2.5%.<sup>3</sup> The drop in enrollment was most severe at California's community colleges, where the majority of Black and Latinx post-secondary students are concentrated.

All learners have been affected, but this report focuses on those most severely impacted: Black, Latinx, Asian Pacific Islander, and Indigenous Californians, as well as adults without post-secondary credentials or those who need to return to post-secondary learning to upskill or re-skill for a different job or industry. What was an existing challenge pre-pandemic is now an undeniable and widening racial attainment gap that demands action.

How do we turn this around? How do we upskill, re-skill, and re-engage displaced workers in the short term? How can we close equity gaps and promote success for students of color and adult learners? What will it take to develop the talent that will drive the state's recovery and diversify the workforce at all levels? The California Recovery with Equity Taskforce wrestled with these important questions.

**All learners have been affected, but this report focuses on those most severely impacted: Black, Latinx, Asian Pacific Islander, and Indigenous Californians, as well as adults without post-secondary credentials or those who need to return to post-secondary learning to upskill or re-skill for a different job or industry.**

**The Taskforce believes California needs a recovery that courageously addresses inequities in post-secondary education that have created and exacerbated wealth gaps.**

**California will thrive when income inequality and disparities of credential and degree attainment by race and geography are eliminated.**



The Taskforce's recommendations focus on redesigning post-secondary education with equity at its core to bring this vision to life by:

- **Listening carefully to the voices and expectations** of Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian Pacific Islander, and adult learners—those student groups experiencing the widest equity gaps today—in determining priorities for redesign of the post-secondary system
- **Dramatically increasing the number and diversity of learners** who earn post-secondary degrees and other credentials
- **Eliminating attainment gaps, with equitable outcomes** for all students regardless of historic distinctions by race and ethnicity, gender, geography, age, immigration status, or economic status
- **Preparing an increasingly diverse population for jobs** critical to the state's economic recovery and future with credentials and degrees in areas such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), healthcare, and education<sup>4</sup>
- **Harnessing the power of California's political and civic leadership,** K–12 education system, business community, and philanthropic institutions to support student success and drive economic mobility in the growing sectors of the state's economy

**As California seeks to recover from the pandemic, it is not enough to go back to the way things were. Californians must learn from this experience, build on their assets, and reimagine the future.** Recovery with Equity will take the efforts of Californians across disciplines: from post-secondary institutions to K–12 schools, from human services agencies to local healthcare providers, from business partners to learner-focused nonprofit organizations. Working together, Californians can change the trajectory of the state so that all its residents have the support they need to qualify for the high-wage, high-quality, high-demand jobs that will drive California's economy. The potential in California is limited only by the talent and skills of its people.

The work ahead is challenging. But the post-secondary sector, in partnership with communities across the state, can build a more equitable future from this crisis. Together, Californians can make that future a reality.

## Taskforce Context

The Recovery with Equity Taskforce was convened to envision a new approach for post-secondary preparation and workforce readiness in California. It was established in August 2020 by Governor Gavin Newsom's Senior Policy Advisor for Higher Education, Dr. Lande Ajose, in consultation with the Governor's Council for Post-Secondary Education. The Recovery with Equity Taskforce comprised California and national experts in higher education equity and innovation and was chaired by Dr. Ajose (see page 6 for a list of Taskforce members).

The Taskforce worked collaboratively to produce a roadmap for California's public post-secondary institutions to recover from the impact of the pandemic more integrated, equitable, and resilient than before—and more aligned with the economic needs of the state. The Taskforce invites and encourages California's independent post-secondary institutions to participate in this agenda as well.

The Taskforce followed an equity-centered process in developing its recommendations. It regularly acknowledged and reflected on race, identity, historical/political context, and power, and rigorously engaged stakeholders most proximate to California's pressing equity issues. Interviews, focus groups, and feedback tools captured the experiences and ideas of 105 leaders and stakeholders from K–12 and higher education, local government, nonprofit organizations, and workforce development agencies (see page 78 for a list of these stakeholders). Most important, this research captured the perspectives of 91 diverse college and high school students from five California regions: the Bay Area, San Joaquin Valley, Inland Empire, Los Angeles, and Imperial Valley.

Following the publication of the Taskforce's report, the Governor's Council for Post-Secondary Education will lead next steps in implementation and engagement.

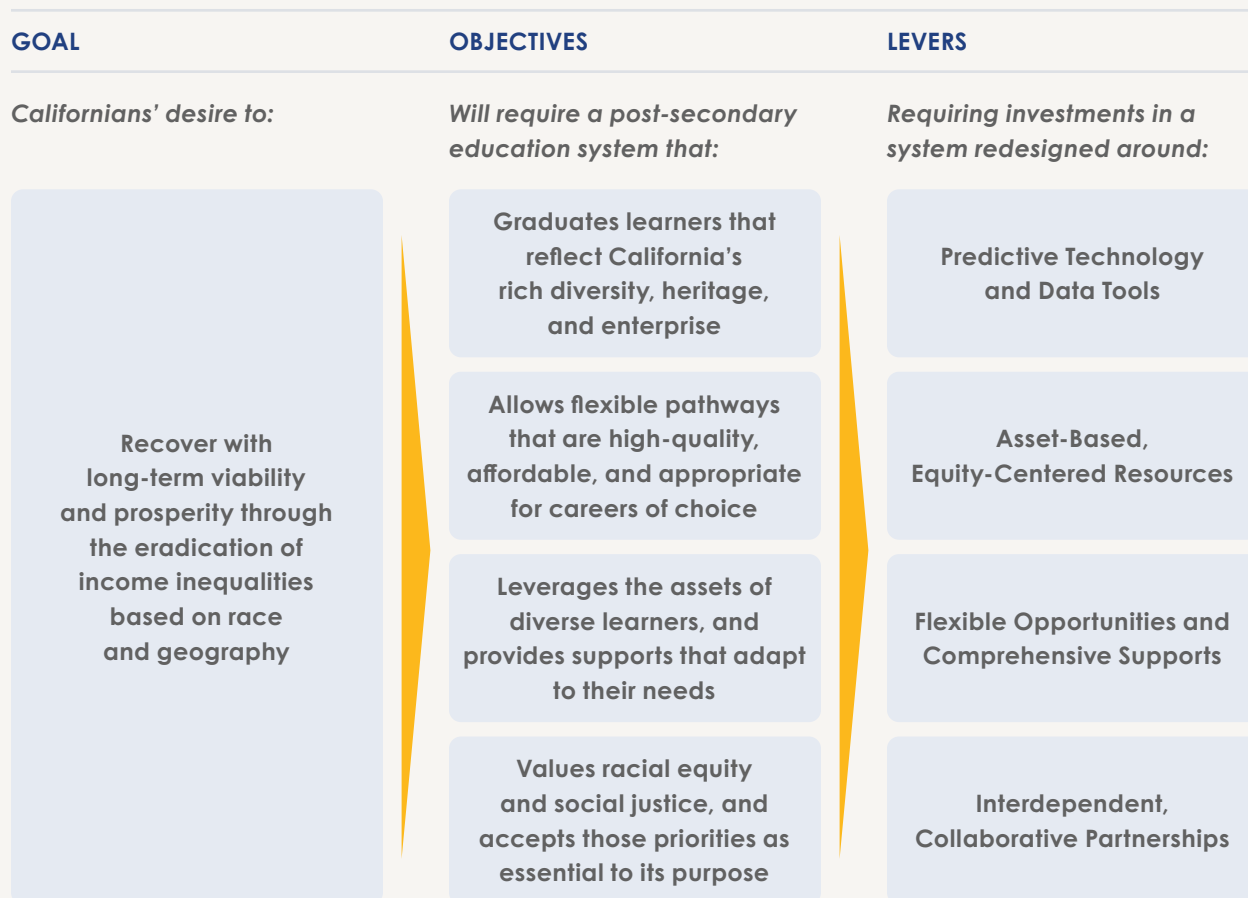


# Recovery Framework

The Taskforce conducted its work with a keen understanding that its task could be accomplished only through far-reaching, deeply embedded system redesign.

Historically, California's higher education system was designed based on implicit assumptions about its student population that do not reflect the richly diverse learners it now serves. While improvements have been made to the higher education system throughout the years, the Taskforce recognized that significant change is still required to realize the system's potential to drive equitable opportunity and economic mobility. The Taskforce's approach resulted in a Recovery Framework (see Figure 1 below) that articulates its vision for a better future for all Californians, redesigns key elements of the system for post-secondary education, and describes the investments required.

**FIGURE 1: RECOVERY FRAMEWORK**



The Recovery Framework illustrates the logic that informed the Taskforce's final recommendations and features a set of four key change levers:

**Predictive Technology  
and Data Tools**

Easy-to-use, automated technology that provides personalized access, navigation, and support for learners along their post-secondary journeys. The tools should be anchored by California's new Cradle-to-Career Data System so that it is integrated across segments and designed with predictive analytics, as well as data-sharing across systems and institutions, to provide learners with timely, coherent, and comprehensive advising, interventions, and resources.

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**Asset-Based,  
Equity-Centered Resources**

Tools, guidance, training, and resources to embed equity-focused culture and commitment at every level of the post-secondary system. Investments should be rooted in instructional environments that are engaging and cultivate a sense of belonging, and in institutional supports that build upon learners' strengths and meet their unique needs and career interests. To be effective, these resources must be embedded within each segment's internal processes.

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**Flexible Opportunities and  
Comprehensive Supports**

Reimagined instructional and resource offerings catered to the "whole learner" and the diversity of their talents, life circumstances, and career pursuits. System structures, processes, and financial supports should be re-engineered to eliminate barriers by embracing flexible educational pathways and innovative student assistance.

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**Interdependent,  
Collaborative Partnerships**

Investment of time and incentives in new and promising ways of working within and across institutions and systems that are learner-centered and equity-driven. Authentic relationships and partnerships can be established by prioritizing the interdependencies that are critical for learner success, and using those interdependencies as the blueprint for regional and statewide coherence.

## Summary of Taskforce Recommendations

Just as the challenges in recovering with equity are complex—and not caused by one factor alone—it is also true that one recommendation alone will not propel Californians in their recovery. The recommendations in this report are a set of interconnected and interdependent systemic solutions meant to fundamentally change the way California supports all learners. California's institutions and systems of education are dedicated to serving students, but must fundamentally shift to a learner-centered perspective that is proactive and prioritizes the supports and structures that will help all learners thrive. To do this work, higher education must collaborate within and across segments and with key partners, including K–12 education, nonprofit organizations, and employers. Independent institutions, which are an integral part of California's higher education system, are invited to join these efforts and to adopt or adapt these recommendations to meet the needs of their student populations.

The Taskforce identified recommendations to advance four guiding principles:



### Fostering Inclusive Institutions

Institutional cultures and approaches to teaching and learning that work for all learners, especially those left behind.



### Streamlining Pathways to Degrees

An integrated statewide system for admission and transfer to provide clear, easy-to-navigate pathways to degrees.



### Facilitating Student Transitions

High-touch, high-tech guidance and improved academic preparation for college access and success.



### Simplifying Supports for Student Stability

Resources and structures packaged and simplified to help students meet basic, digital, and financial aid needs.





## Fostering Inclusive Institutions

**Goal:** By 2030, learners of all backgrounds will report that they feel valued, supported, and affirmed at their institutions; that faculty are adept at creating courses that are responsive to and build upon the unique experiences, needs, and talents of all learners; and that post-secondary institutions actively support their academic success and career readiness.

### 1. Improve Faculty, Staff, and Administrator Diversity

An equitable and inclusive culture cannot occur if campus personnel do not reflect the rich diversity of California. Expanding faculty, staff, and administrator diversity requires dedicated, intentional efforts bolstered by strong data monitoring and accountability.

### 2. Cultivate Inclusive, Engaging, and Equity-Oriented Learning Environments

System and local boards, faculty, administrators, and staff need professional development, resources, and support to redesign the learning environment so that it better serves all learners.

### 3. Retain Students through Inclusive Supports

To develop an affirming and supportive culture that promotes student wellbeing and academic success, institutions must intentionally, thoughtfully, and creatively evaluate and, as necessary, redesign current support activities and develop new practices and programs.



## Streamlining Pathways to Degrees

**Goal:** By 2030, learners will have clear, easy-to-navigate pathways into and through post-secondary education, as well as admission and transfer processes facilitated by an integrated technology platform, dual admission, and common course numbering.

### 4. Establish an Integrated Admissions Platform

California should create a single technology platform for admissions and transfer to replace the currently overwhelming and byzantine application and transfer processes. Designed well, such a platform also can help colleges and universities better manage enrollment, integrate recognition of students' existing knowledge and skills through credit for prior learning and mastery-based learning, plan for course delivery, and address capacity constraints.

## 5. Streamline and Unify the College Admission Process

Recognizing that most learners attend more than one college in order to earn a degree, California public institutions should adopt a streamlined and unified admission process, enabled by an integrated technology platform, that provides an option for dual admission to smooth the pathway for learners who wish to attend a four-year institution but begin at a community college.

## 6. Develop a Common Course Numbering System

To streamline transfer from two- to four-year institutions and reduce excess credit accumulation, California's community colleges should adopt a common course numbering system, starting with general education requirements, and eventually expanding to transfer pathway courses. The aim would be to align all community college courses so that students transferring to four-year institutions know, as they are pursuing their courses, that they are meeting the requirements of the receiving institutions.



### Facilitating Student Transitions

**Goal:** By 2030, learners in all public schools will have access to college preparatory coursework; early college experiences; and a high-tech, high-touch advising system that supports their success from middle and high school into and through higher education and into the workforce.

## 7. Provide High-Tech, High-Touch Advising

Through an integrated technology platform paired with a statewide chatbot, California can ensure that middle school, high school, and college learners (and those who support them) can access all the information they need regarding learners' educational records, college preparation, enrollment, financial aid, and progress toward a degree. The technology platform and chatbot should integrate tools to allow advisors to provide data-driven, high-tech, high-touch advising to support learners on their pathways to degrees.

## 8. Support College Preparation and Early Credit

Completing a college preparatory curriculum is important to high school learners' ability to transition and succeed in post-secondary education. A–G course completion sets learners up to be eligible for admission to CSU and UC, and earning early college credit—for example, through dual enrollment—not only gives learners credit toward a post-secondary degree but also can instill confidence in their ability to be successful in college. K–12 and post-secondary education should work together to make A–G coursework the default high school curriculum, strengthen K–12 accountability for college preparation, and expand access to early college experiences.



## Simplifying Supports for Student Stability

**Goal:** By 2030, learners will receive support to meet basic needs through a simplified, integrated system that enables qualified college students to access California's social services, subsidized internet and technology, and increased financial aid.

### 9. Integrate Platform of State Services for Students

California should build an integrated platform that allows learners to apply all at once for the full spectrum of state services they qualify to receive (e.g., financial aid, CalFresh, housing programs, health/mental healthcare, subsidized childcare, transportation, internet/technology support, etc.). The system also would provide all students, families, and advisors with a simplified, low-burden approach to completing the FAFSA and the California Dream Act Application (CADAA) prior to high school graduation and return timely information to support their next steps. When combined with a unified college application process, this system can become a powerful one-stop shop for post-secondary learners, families, and advisors.

### 10. Subsidize Internet Access for Eligible Students

California should provide students who need it with subsidized access to reliable internet service by expanding the amount of funds offered through Cal Grant B and forming public-private partnerships to offer support for internet and technology access to all students who qualify. This strategy builds on the significant effort begun early in the pandemic to expand technology access, and on recommendations of the *California Broadband for All*<sup>5</sup> report issued in late 2020.

### 11. Improve College Affordability

California would benefit from increasing and diversifying opportunities for financial aid, as well as providing students with paid work opportunities (including federal work study) that prepare them for careers without getting in the way of their academic progress. Finally, California must create a pathway whereby learners can complete post-secondary education without having to take on additional debt, through a combination of refocusing and increasing student financial aid.



# Introduction

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**California has long been known for its strong and innovative economy, demographic diversity, and enviable quality of life. The state's rich and diverse environment—from mountains to deserts to farmland to beaches—makes it one of the most popular places to live. But the true value of California lies in its people.**

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The global coronavirus pandemic has had devastating health and economic consequences for the people of California. It also has exacerbated existing employment and wealth gaps, food and housing insecurity, and inequality of digital access. All of this change has occurred in the midst of our nation's reckoning over systemic racism.

**It is critical to chart a course to a new day when all Californians can actively participate in helping our state thrive.** What is the best route to that future? Preparing everyone with the training and education necessary to engage in the high-quality, in-demand jobs that will drive a recovering, vital economy.

**The current rate of educational attainment in California is insufficient to meet workforce needs.** Most of the fastest-growing high-quality jobs in the state require post-secondary education, and there are significant gaps in educational attainment by race/ethnicity and geographic region.<sup>6</sup> Low-income, first-generation, Latinx, Black, and Indigenous students—who make up most of the student population in California's public high schools—are less likely than their peers to finish high school, complete the A–G coursework necessary for admission to the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU), enroll in college, and graduate from college.<sup>7</sup>

As the Recovery with Equity Taskforce began its work in the summer of 2020, California had the fifth highest unemployment rate in the nation, with Black and Latinx residents and residents of inland and rural communities experiencing the highest rates of all.<sup>9</sup> Many who have experienced unemployment or underemployment during the pandemic are in industries unable to move to remote work (such as tourism and hospitality) and do not possess the credentials needed to access jobs in other growing and in-demand occupations. More than half of California's labor force with a high school degree or less (who account for 38% of all workers in the state) has filed for unemployment since March 2020 compared with 13% of the labor force with a bachelor's degree or higher. Virtually all of the Black labor force with a high school degree or less (99%) has filed for unemployment, along with 75% of the Asian Pacific Islander labor force with this level of education, compared with 52% of the white labor force and 33% of the Latinx labor force that did the same.<sup>10</sup> Coastal regions far exceed inland regions in percentage of residents with post-secondary degrees; this trend mirrors economic disparities between the coastal and inland regions.

Many Californians are choosing between feeding their families and incurring the real costs of pursuing degrees that could change their futures for the better. While virtual instruction presents an opportunity to significantly expand capacity, it also presents an array of challenges, including access to necessary technology, quality of online teaching, and lack of necessary personal and academic support. In addition, out-of-work adults often have trouble finding post-secondary programs with the kind of intensive, just-in-time approach and support they need to quickly retrain for different industries and get back on their feet. With families sheltering at home, students of all ages learning virtually, and many out of work or underemployed, participating in post-secondary education is an increasingly difficult choice to make.

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The result? Many Californians are choosing not to re-enroll in programs they have already begun or not to enter post-secondary education at all. Fall 2020 post-secondary enrollment dropped by 6.1% in California compared with fall 2019, far worse than the national one-year enrollment decline of 2.5%.<sup>11</sup> The drop in enrollment was most severe at California's community colleges, where the majority of Black and Latinx post-secondary students are concentrated.

All learners have been affected by the pandemic, but this report focuses on those most severely impacted: Black, Latinx, Asian Pacific Islander, and Indigenous Californians, as well as adults without post-secondary credentials or those who need to return to post-secondary learning to upskill or re-skill for a different job or industry. What was an existing challenge pre-pandemic is now an undeniable and widening racial attainment gap that demands action.

How do we turn this around? How do we upskill, re-skill, and re-engage displaced workers in the short term? How can we close equity gaps and promote success for students of color and adult learners? What will it take to develop the talent that will drive the state's recovery and diversify the workforce at all levels? The California Recovery with Equity Taskforce wrestled with these important questions.

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***California will thrive when income inequality and disparities of credential and degree attainment by race and geography are eliminated.***

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- **Dramatically increasing the number and diversity of learners** who earn post-secondary degrees and other credentials
- **Eliminating attainment gaps, with equitable outcomes** for all students regardless of historic distinctions by race and ethnicity, gender, geography, age, immigration status, or economic status
- **Preparing an increasingly diverse population for jobs** critical to the state's economic recovery and future with credentials and degrees in areas such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), healthcare, and education<sup>12</sup>
- **Harnessing the power of California's political and civic leadership,** K–12 education system, business community, and philanthropic institutions to support student success and drive economic mobility in the growing sectors of the state's economy

**As California seeks to recover from the pandemic, it is not enough to go back to the way things were. Californians must learn from this experience, build on their assets, and reimagine the future.** Recovery with Equity will take the efforts of Californians across disciplines: from post-secondary institutions to K–12 schools, from human services agencies to local healthcare providers, from business partners to learner-focused nonprofit organizations. Working together, Californians can change the trajectory of the state so that all its residents have the support they need to qualify for the high-wage, high-quality, high-demand jobs that will drive California's economy. The potential in California is limited only by the talent and skills of its people.

The work ahead is challenging. But the post-secondary sector, in partnership with communities across the state, can build a more equitable future from this crisis. Together, Californians can make that future a reality.

# The Recovery with Equity Taskforce

The Recovery with Equity Taskforce was convened to envision a new approach to post-secondary preparation and workforce readiness in California. It was established in August 2020 by Governor Newsom's Senior Policy Advisor for Higher Education, Dr. Lande Ajose, in consultation with the Governor's Council for Post-Secondary Education. The Recovery with Equity Taskforce comprised an intentionally diverse team of California and national experts in higher education equity and innovation and was chaired by Dr. Ajose (see page 6 for a list of Taskforce members).

The Taskforce worked collaboratively to produce a roadmap for California's public post-secondary institutions to recover from the impact of the pandemic more integrated, equitable, and resilient than before—and more aligned with the economic needs of the state. The Taskforce invites and encourages California's independent post-secondary institutions to participate in this agenda as well.

This Taskforce's recommendations acknowledge and build on numerous initiatives already underway to address some barriers and inequities. Examples of existing initiatives include:

- *California Community Colleges: Vision for Success*, placement reforms and elimination of remedial courses, the California College Promise, and Associate Degree for Transfer<sup>3</sup>
- *Career Technical Education: K12 Strong Workforce Program*, Career Technical Education Incentive Grant, California Career Pathways Trust<sup>4</sup>
- *California State University: Graduation Initiative 2025*, policy changes to general education and remedial education in 2017<sup>5</sup>
- *University of California: UC 2030*, 2018 Enhancing Student Transfer agreement<sup>6</sup>
- California Student Aid Commission's Cal Grant Modernization Project<sup>7</sup>
- California Cradle-to-Career Data System<sup>8</sup>
- California College Guidance Initiative<sup>9</sup>

Each month from August 2020 to January 2021, Taskforce members convened virtually to identify and discuss the most pressing equity issues in California's post-secondary education system and develop recommendations for change using equity-centered design methods. Throughout the process, the Taskforce was driven by questions all states should be asking themselves:

*Are people from all demographic groups and geographic regions earning the credentials and degrees that will help them—and our state economy—thrive? Are our post-secondary institutions and systems equitably supporting not just student learning and academics, but students' ability to access economic and social mobility? If not, what is in the way? Which students are succeeding and who is being left out? What are students telling us about their aspirations, challenges, experiences, and needs as they look to earn degrees? What will it really take for post-secondary education in California to seize this moment of change and use it to recover from the pandemic fundamentally more equitable and resilient than it was before?*

The Taskforce followed an intentional process to ensure that equity remained its highest priority every step of the way.

- **Vision-setting:** The Taskforce began its work by discussing a vision of recovery for post-secondary education in California and establishing a set of equity commitments for each phase of the Taskforce process (see page 86 for the Taskforce Equity Framework).
- **Research and stakeholder engagement:** Next, the Taskforce reviewed and discussed quantitative and qualitative research<sup>20</sup> on post-secondary education and workforce outcomes in California, as well as the needs and experiences of priority stakeholders throughout the state. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with 105 leaders and stakeholders from K–12 and higher education, local government, nonprofit organizations, and workforce development (see page 78 for a list of stakeholder participants). In addition, focus groups were conducted with 91 diverse college and high school students from five California regions: the Bay Area, San Joaquin Valley, Inland Empire, Los Angeles, and Imperial Valley. With this data in hand, the Taskforce was able to hone in on the most important issues in the state's post-secondary education system, with a clear understanding that Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian Pacific Islander, and adult students needed to be at the center of its recommendations.
- **Solution development:** Once critical equity issues had been identified, the Taskforce organized into small working groups with some of the state's leading post-secondary and workforce experts to brainstorm and develop solutions to address those issues. The working groups' solution ideas were then shared with the same stakeholders who had participated in the initial interviews and focus groups to get their thoughts and feedback to help shape the Taskforce's final recommendations (see page 77 for a list of working group members).
- **Recommendations and dissemination:** Taskforce members then continued to meet and work together to refine solution ideas into a final set of guiding principles, each with a problem statement, goal, and set of specific, actionable recommendations to achieve that goal.

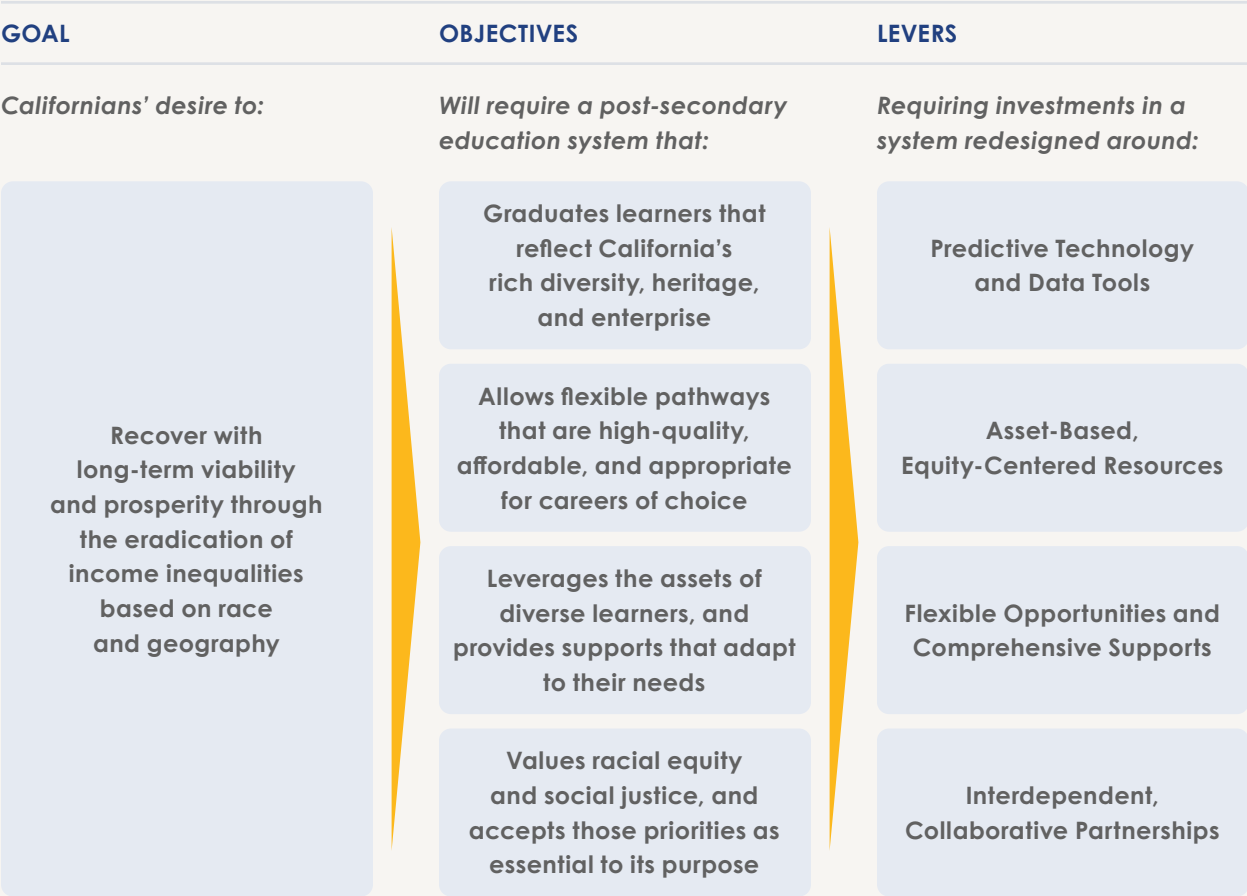
Throughout this process, the Taskforce followed an equity-centered approach, reflecting on race, identity, power, and historical/political context in its work, and rigorously engaging people most proximate to the state's pressing equity issues through interviews, focus groups, and feedback tools.

# Recovery Framework

The Taskforce conducted its work with a keen understanding that its task could be accomplished only through far-reaching, deeply embedded system redesign.

Historically, California's higher education system was designed based on implicit assumptions about its student population that do not reflect the richly diverse learners it now serves. While improvements have been made to the higher education system throughout the years, the Taskforce recognized that significant change is still required to realize the system's potential to drive equitable opportunity and economic mobility. The Taskforce's approach resulted in a Recovery Framework (see Figure 1 below) that articulates its vision for a better future for all Californians, redesigns key elements of the system for post-secondary education, and describes the investments required.

**FIGURE 1: RECOVERY FRAMEWORK**





The Recovery Framework illustrates the logic that informed the Taskforce's final recommendations and features a set of four key change levers:

<b>Predictive Technology and Data Tools</b>	Easy-to-use, automated technology that provides personalized access, navigation, and support for learners along their post-secondary journeys. The tools should be anchored by California's new Cradle-to-Career Data System so that it is integrated across segments and designed with predictive analytics, as well as data-sharing across systems and institutions, to provide learners with timely, coherent, and comprehensive advising, interventions, and resources.
<b>Asset-Based, Equity-Centered Resources</b>	Tools, guidance, training, and resources to embed equity-focused culture and commitment at every level of the post-secondary system. Investments should be rooted in instructional environments that are engaging and cultivate a sense of belonging, and in institutional supports that build upon learners' strengths and meet their unique needs and career interests. To be effective, these resources must be embedded within each segment's internal processes.
<b>Flexible Opportunities and Comprehensive Supports</b>	Reimagined instructional and resource offerings catered to the "whole learner" and the diversity of their talents, life circumstances, and career pursuits. System structures, processes, and financial supports should be re-engineered to eliminate barriers by embracing flexible educational pathways and innovative student assistance.
<b>Interdependent, Collaborative Partnerships</b>	Investment of time and incentives in new and promising ways of working within and across institutions and systems that are learner-centered and equity-driven. Authentic relationships and partnerships can be established by prioritizing the interdependencies that are critical for learner success, and using those interdependencies as the blueprint for regional and statewide coherence.

# Key Research Findings

The Taskforce's deliberations were informed by extensive research on post-secondary and workforce outcomes and experiences in California. Research activities included review of key findings from existing reports, original analyses of publicly available data, and interviews and focus groups with 196 stakeholders across California.

## FINDINGS FROM REPORTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

In California, a bachelor's degree yields higher wages, increased full-time employment, and lower unemployment. Those with a bachelor's degree are more likely to own a home, less likely to live in poverty, and more likely to be civically engaged. Demand for workers with post-secondary credentials is increasing in the vast majority of industries, including those that traditionally have not required post-secondary credentials.<sup>21</sup>

Academic and occupational sub-baccalaureate degrees and credentials are also an important part of California's higher education system. One in three jobs in California requires some college but less than a bachelor's degree. Those with career education credentials see an average 20% increase in earnings and, while they still earn less than those with a bachelor's degree, this increase in earnings can be substantial for many Californians.<sup>22</sup>

Educational attainment in California is insufficient to meet the current and anticipated demand for high-skill workers.<sup>23</sup> Only 42% of residents aged 25 or older hold an associate's degree or higher, and only 34% hold a bachelor's degree or higher (slightly above the national rate of 32%).<sup>24</sup> When non-degree workforce credentials are added into these calculations, California is estimated to have 51% post-secondary attainment among its adult population.<sup>25</sup>

**Educational attainment in California is insufficient to meet the current and anticipated demand for high-skill workers.**

Further, Californians have inequitable access and support on the pathway to and through post-secondary education. Gaps in educational attainment exist along racial/ethnic and economic lines: Low-income, first-generation, Latinx, Black, and Indigenous learners—who make up most of the population in California's public high schools—are less likely than their peers to finish high school, complete the A–G coursework necessary for admission to the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU), enroll in college, and graduate from college.<sup>26</sup> Gaps in educational attainment also exist geographically, with coastal regions far exceeding inland regions in the percentage of residents with post-secondary degrees;<sup>27</sup> this trend mirrors economic disparities between the coastal and inland regions, and also reflects the greater number of post-secondary institutions in coastal versus inland regions.<sup>28</sup>

Numerous reports identify barriers to post-secondary access and success in California, including:

- Overall college affordability and support for students' basic needs
- Lack of clear pathways and processes to get to and through higher education<sup>29</sup>
- Lack of coherence between K–12 and higher education as well as within the three public higher education segments<sup>30</sup>
- Limited seats and course availability
- Constrained capacity to use data to track and support students<sup>31</sup>

Affordability is a particular concern. The lowest-income students in California spend a significantly larger portion of their family income paying for post-secondary education than higher-income students, and half of California college graduates leave college with student loan debt averaging \$23,000.<sup>32</sup> While this is relatively low in national terms, debt is disproportionately concentrated among low-income students and students of color, presenting a distinct equity concern.

The pandemic has exacerbated challenges for California's post-secondary students, staff, and institutions. First and foremost, the pandemic has disproportionately affected the health of the Latinx population in California, with Latinx Californians comprising 55% of cases and 47% of deaths while they comprise only 39% of the state's population.<sup>33</sup>

Given California's high cost of living, meeting post-secondary students' basic needs was a major challenge before the pandemic, and these needs have intensified since the onset of the pandemic. As of July 2020, the percentage of students who expressed “a lot” of concern about paying for housing and food, affording adequate technology/internet, caring for family members, and maintaining personal health and wellbeing had more than tripled since before the pandemic.<sup>34</sup>

**Total enrollment in the California Community Colleges system dropped by 5.2% in 2020, course withdrawals increased by 55%, and course enrollment fell by 17%.<sup>33</sup>**

These concerns appear to have influenced some learners to stop out of college or to delay initial enrollment. Total enrollment in the California Community Colleges system dropped by 5.2% in 2020, course withdrawals increased by 55%, and course enrollment fell by 17%.<sup>35</sup> The decline in course enrollment was most severe for Black (23%) and Indigenous students (36%). First-time freshman enrollment at CSU is down 6% (though overall enrollment increased by 0.75%).<sup>36</sup>

## FINDINGS FROM STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

To ensure that the Taskforce's recommendations were well-tailored to current needs and circumstances across California, it was important to hear directly from stakeholders on the ground. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with 196 individuals, including leaders from post-secondary institutions, K–12 school districts, nonprofit organizations, and workforce development agencies, as well as high school and college students in five California regions: the Bay Area, San Joaquin Valley, Inland Empire, Los Angeles, and Imperial Valley. The following key findings emerged from these interviews and focus groups.

### **The prevalence of racial injustice in higher education is a major barrier to student success.**

Racial injustice, combined with economic uncertainty and the removal of students from campus environments where they have relationships and support, is taking a toll on students' sense of belonging. Students in focus groups wondered aloud, "What is my place in the world? Am I going to be welcome at college?" Stakeholders raised concerns about the role of policing on campus, the prevalence of microaggressions and discrimination, instances of blatant racism, a lack of affirming and culturally responsive classrooms, and inadequate support for students to find community and belonging. It will take ongoing and consistent action—including faculty and staff mindset shifts and professional development—to support all students, particularly racially minoritized students, along the path to and through college.

*"There must be a commitment to equity—distribution of resources to address decades of disinvestment—to bring justice to how this pandemic has disproportionately impacted communities of color."*

— Local Civic Leader



**The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequities in society, heightening barriers to students meeting their basic needs.**

Students must meet basic needs in order to successfully engage in education. The pandemic has raised additional barriers to having these needs met, particularly for learners who were already experiencing disadvantage in the system. These needs include food, shelter, healthcare, mental health services, transportation, internet and device access, and emergency dependent care.

*“Students experiencing poverty are faced with choosing between going to school or working to support family and take care of siblings—parents didn’t have the luxury to work from home. Many are essential workers, putting responsibility on older children to take care of siblings or work.”*

**— K–12 Leader**

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**The digital divide—access to and cost of both adequate devices and internet connectivity with sufficient bandwidth—has been fully exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic.**

Particularly for low-income students and students in more remote areas, access to the internet can be extremely challenging. In some places, connectivity is not available, and in all places, connectivity adds to family expenses. For families with multiple students, a higher level of bandwidth is needed to accommodate K–12 learning and online college classes happening concurrently. In addition, homes must have multiple devices to effectively accommodate multiple learners engaged at the same time. While some colleges and universities tried to provide connectivity through WiFi hotspots and by working with internet providers or extending service to school parking lots, each approach came with its own challenges, creating additional costs or inconvenience. Internet access and appropriate devices must be considered a “basic need” for students who wish to pursue an education in the 21st century.

*“We’ve known for ten years that the connectivity issue is a real barrier to learning. Suddenly—with the pandemic—our educators are saying, ‘we must do something.’ The message isn’t new. We turned our heads, and it wasn’t a priority.”*

**— Nonprofit Organization Leader**



### **The pandemic has deeply impacted students' mental and emotional health.**

Due to the pandemic, many students lost on-campus social networks, personal and family income, access to housing and childcare, and learning supports like internet access, devices, and a quiet place to study. Some have experienced the severe illness and death of family and friends. Simultaneously, many students took on additional responsibilities at home. While students have been incredibly resilient in overcoming and persisting through these challenges, the combination of these stressors has been difficult for students to handle mentally and emotionally. Unfortunately, access to mental health services has been inconsistent for students due to a dramatic increase in demand, the challenges of services being offered in a virtual format, and lack of counselor diversity and cultural competency.

*"For students, they admit very publicly that they're experiencing depression because of what we're living through. We have virtual support for staff, but not enough."*

— Higher Education Leader

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### **Some California industries may not fully recover from the pandemic, which will disproportionately impact students prioritized in this report.**

The pandemic impacted industries dominated by Black and Latinx workers (e.g., tourism, construction, agriculture, manufacturing). Workforce experts believe that some of these industries may not fully recover to pre-pandemic levels due to increased reliance on technology and automation. This creates a need for speedy and agile workforce retraining and upskilling, and increases the importance of strong and direct connections between post-secondary education and the business community. Without them, California will lose critical talent, and families will miss out on the economic mobility they could have achieved.

*"We have seen a reduction in the size of the labor pool. There has been some drop in migration of labor. Some people are going home to care for family back in Mexico—it takes just small shifts in behavior to have a large impact on our workforce."*

— Economic Development Partner

**The unpredictable nature of the pandemic is a major factor that limits recovery efforts.**

The unpredictability of the virus and its effects causes leaders to hesitate on timelines for systemwide recovery. The availability of a vaccine, public health responses to the pandemic outbreaks, and new variants of the virus may influence recovery efforts across the state. Some institutions are choosing to maintain distance learning exclusively until conditions improve. For institutions operating on hybrid schedules, student compliance with social distancing guidelines is a key determinant of recovery.

*"We are anxious about the long-term outlook of how we come out of this. We are underserved, and we've had a lot of risk factors present for COVID, and we don't have a lot of health support. We're afraid we don't come out of it, and it may become endemic to us."*

— P-16 Partner

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**Decreased enrollment and budget cuts due to the pandemic exacerbate existing financial challenges and inequities in the higher education system.**

Across and within the three segments, higher education stakeholders perceive that funding is inequitable, and express concern that the volatility and unpredictability of state budgets will exacerbate, rather than address, these challenges.

*"There is a multiplicity of issues that will require investment in higher education, and I think post-COVID you're going to see even more complex behavioral impacts that will require us to really be thoughtful in our investment in higher education. Now, with these budget cuts due to lost revenue we have to do more with less in a more complex environment, an environment where students are going to have a multiplicity of social emotional issues walking into the classroom."*

— Higher Education Leader



**Connections between K–12 and post-secondary education are not strong and pervasive enough to support successful transitions for all learners.**

Qualifying for, applying to, and enrolling in a post-secondary institution is a complex, multiyear process. Because of this, students without a history of college-going in their families—students who are disproportionately low-income, older, and from communities of color—are at an inherent disadvantage. Many students are in need of high-touch advising to meet admission requirements and navigate the admission and financial aid process, but existing resources in schools and the nonprofit sector are stretched thin. This challenge has been exacerbated by the pandemic, with students struggling to receive information and guidance that was easier to access when school was conducted in person. Students need clear post-secondary degree roadmaps to follow, as well as advising and data systems that support their success at every step of preparation and transition.

*“We have a new counselor who has been here for a year, but I don't depend on her and I'm not comfortable asking her questions. I'm a dual enrollment student, so when I need something I depend on my advisor, not my counselors. My advisor is my freshman year counselor, and she's my A–G advisor now and I depend on her.”*

**— High School Student**

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**Connections between higher education and the workforce are insufficient to meet the economic and workforce needs of California.**

As a result, students often do not see a clear connection between post-secondary programs and achieving their career goals. Career information and advising, degree pathways, credit for prior learning, mastery-based learning, internships and other work-based learning opportunities, and micro-credentials are all approaches that can help students find their way through to post-secondary credentials and to gain valuable work experience along the way. Strengthening connections between higher education and employers is important to helping students prepare for and select in-demand jobs that will support the state's economic recovery in an equitable and sustainable way.

*“We need a much more dynamic work-based learning and experiential learning piece to our community college system. It's the missing piece to the experience we provide our students. Simple changes [are needed]—most work experiences are capped at 16 units, so they do that as a very small part of their elective experience.”*

**— Higher Education Leader**

**Lack of flexibility and coherence within the higher education system creates barriers to student success.**

For example, without a common course numbering system and comprehensive transfer policies, students struggle to transfer credits between institutions and to plan out a coherent roadmap to earning their degree. In addition, students find the process of applying for financial aid—and understanding what it does and does not cover out of the “true cost of attendance”—to be inaccessible. Policies intended to support students, such as the Fifty Percent Law, can limit the flexibility of institutions to tend to student needs (e.g., advising) and limit statewide transferability.<sup>37</sup>

*“The transfer [degree]—ADT—is an example of a program from the state that was supposed to strengthen the transfer process, but it’s a mystery to most students, even those that qualified.”*

**— Nonprofit Organization Leader**

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**The completion and implementation of the statewide longitudinal data system will be critical to system redesign.**

Without a statewide data system, it is difficult to know how students are moving through the education pipeline and how best to understand both regional and statewide needs. The Cradle-to-Career Data System will protect student privacy, support intrusive advising, and illustrate students’ movement from K–12 to post-secondary, as well as across the three post-secondary segments and into the workforce. To support students at scale, it is critical to have data that tracks student retention, completion, time to degree, level of attainment, and workforce engagement.

*“There’s a real need for the post-secondary systems to get better about sharing data. Some systems are fragmented, but the state needs to figure out how to get the data to play together. If any state can figure that out, it should be California, but we’re behind other states.”*

**— Higher Education Leader**

**Because of the challenges and limitations of remote instruction, some students have come to believe that higher education is no longer worth the time, expense, and effort.**

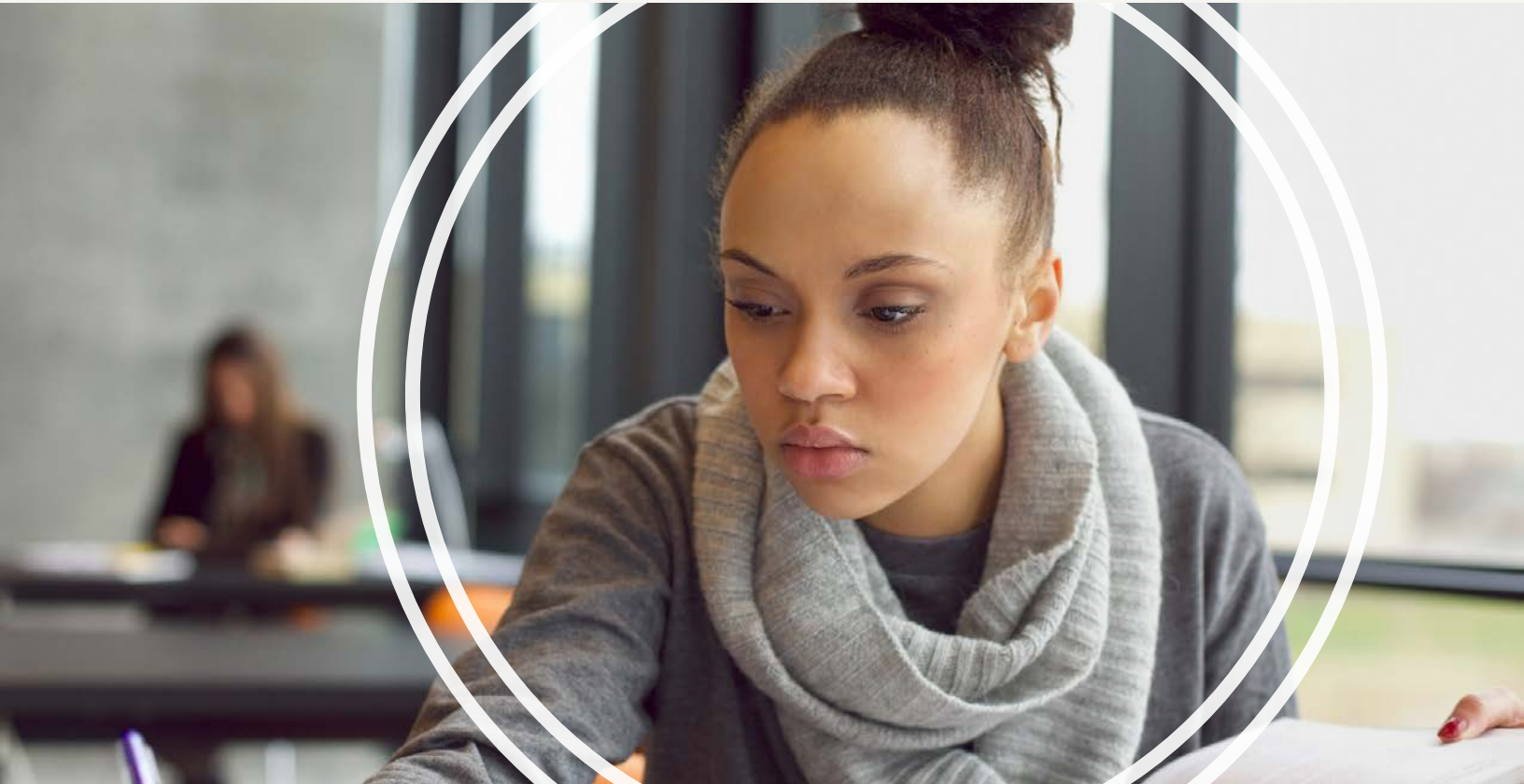
Students question whether the education they are receiving remotely will enable them to meet their career goals. They also perceive a lack of culturally responsive curricula and teaching practices, lack of flexibility in scheduling and assignments, and lack of empathy and engagement from their professors. Some students expressed that these concerns existed before the pandemic and have become worse under the switch to online classes. Because of this perceived mismatch between the cost of attending college—in both time and money—and the value of the education they are receiving, some students are re-evaluating whether they should invest in higher education at all and are considering dropping out permanently or stopping out until in-person instruction resumes.

*“The instructors should be expected to perform at their best level like they expect the students to do. We need to get what we’re paying for!”*

**— College Student**

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**Based on these findings, the Taskforce has developed a set of recommendations to address the challenges post-secondary students and institutions face in recovering with equity from the pandemic.**



# Recommendations

The recommendations in this report are a set of interconnected and interdependent systemic solutions meant to fundamentally change the way California supports all of its residents in equitably preparing for and engaging in education and careers. California's institutions and systems of education are dedicated to serving students, but must fundamentally shift to a learner-centered perspective that is proactive and prioritizes the supports and structures that will help all learners thrive. To do this work, higher education must collaborate within and across segments and with key partners, including K-12 education, nonprofit organizations, and employers. Independent institutions, which are an integral part of California's higher education system, are invited to join these efforts and to adopt or adapt these recommendations to meet the needs of their student populations.

The Taskforce identified four guiding principles that comprise the recommendations:

-  **Fostering Inclusive Institutions**  
Institutional cultures and approaches to teaching and learning that work for all learners, especially those left behind.
-  **Streamlining Pathways to Degrees**  
An integrated statewide system for admission and transfer to provide clear, easy-to-navigate pathways to degrees.
-  **Facilitating Student Transitions**  
High-touch, high-tech guidance and improved academic preparation for college access and success.
-  **Simplifying Supports for Student Stability**  
Resources and structures packaged and simplified to help students meet basic, digital, and financial aid needs.



Each guiding principle includes three key components:

**PROBLEM**

What is the issue, why does it matter, and how will addressing this issue impact priority student groups?

**GOAL**

What is the end state to be achieved, for whom, and within what timeframe?

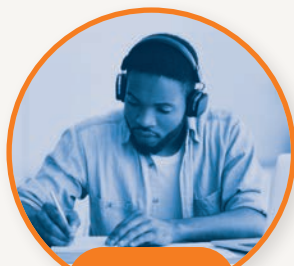
**STRATEGIES**

What policy, practice, and resource allocation are needed to reach the goal?



## Case Examples

To illustrate the impact of the Taskforce recommendations, this report includes case examples using the following fictional student personas. These personas are deeply informed by the interviews and focus groups conducted for this report, while protecting the anonymity of individual students.



**Erik**

**age 19**  
**Black**

*Erik grew up in a proud, historic community in Los Angeles. He lives with his parents and two younger siblings and commutes to a local community college. He hopes to eventually transfer to a CSU campus to earn a degree in nursing, but he worries about taking the right classes and whether he can even hope to be admitted to such a popular program. Even though his tuition is low, he works as much as possible to afford his car and also contribute to his family's household expenses. He also tries to help his younger siblings, who are attending school remotely. He wishes that his professors were more understanding of how hard it is to balance online classes, work, and family responsibilities.*



**Marisol**

**age 14**  
**Latinx**

*Marisol's parents immigrated to California and settled in the San Joaquin Valley. Seeing how hard her parents work motivates Marisol to excel in school. She would like to attend a UC to study engineering, but she worries about affording it. She also wonders whether her high school is preparing her to be successful in such a highly competitive academic program. She tried to talk to a counselor at her high school, but there wasn't an appointment available for several weeks.*



**Michaela**

**age 27**  
**Asian Pacific Islander**

*Michaela works at a day-care center in Oakland; it is not a high-paying job, but it provides discounted tuition for her three-year-old daughter. She loves working with children and is thinking about attending community college to begin the process of becoming a teacher, but she wonders whether she can manage work, parenting, and school. She sees ads online for for-profit schools and wonders whether that might be a faster and more certain route to a teaching job.*



# Fostering Inclusive Institutions

*Institutional cultures and approaches to teaching and learning that work for all learners, especially those left behind.*

## PROBLEM

**Institutional cultures and classrooms are not shaped around the experiences of students of color and adult students—and this impacts student success.**

The pandemic and the nationwide racial reckoning have only exposed and exacerbated the mismatch between who California's students are and how they are served.

An equity-focused institutional culture is needed to promote the success of Black, Latinx, Asian Pacific Islander, Indigenous, and adult learners. When an institutional culture is inclusive, diverse, and equity-centered, we know students are “better educated and better prepared for leadership, citizenship, and professional competitiveness.”<sup>38</sup> In addition, an equity-centered institutional culture is key to successful implementation of the Taskforce's other recommendations.

*“One thing that has negatively impacted me is that there are no African American studies courses on my campus. It's offensive, it's really hurtful, and it's not helpful to developing my identity.”*

— College Student

## GOAL

**By 2030, learners of all backgrounds will report that they are valued, supported, and affirmed at their institutions; that faculty are adept at creating courses that are responsive to and build upon the unique experiences, needs, and talents of all learners; and that post-secondary institutions actively support their academic success and career readiness.**

Inclusive institutional cultures recognize and value students as key partners and sources of expertise. Such cultures reflect an asset-based approach, recognizing the contribution that students' unique backgrounds and experiences bring to the educational environment, making the curricula relevant to students' unique experiences and interests, and helping students thrive through cultivating a sense of belonging. Within an inclusive and anti-racist institutional culture, faculty hold the same aspirations and standards for all students and believe in their capacity to achieve. Such a culture benefits all students, regardless of background.

To implement inclusive cultures, higher education leaders and institutions must design and advance systems that meet students where they are by providing relevant resources, culturally competent learning environments, recognition of students' family and work commitments, integration of career-relevant knowledge and skills, and equity-oriented curricula and course pathways.

As outlined in the strategies that follow, developing inclusive institutional cultures requires transforming professional development and hiring practices, improving classroom experiences, and aligning student supports.

## RECOMMENDATION 1

### Improve Faculty, Staff, and Administrator Diversity

An equitable and inclusive culture cannot exist if campus personnel do not reflect the rich diversity of California. Expanding faculty, staff, and administrator diversity requires dedicated, intentional efforts bolstered by strong data monitoring and accountability.

#### Policy Changes at the State, Segment, and Institutional Levels:

- Adopt and implement **innovative hiring practices** to increase faculty, staff, and administrator diversity, including equity-centered outreach and duty statements, inclusive minimum qualification and selection processes, cluster hiring, diversity in hiring committees, exit interviews, and first-year onboarding programs.
- Redesign **Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) plans** to uplift equity-centered practices throughout all aspects of employment process and retention. These documents should be tools for reflection and innovation, not compliance.
- Include a periodic **review of progress on EEO plans in board agendas** at the segment and local levels.

### Practice Changes at the Segment and Institutional Levels:

- Develop **supports for diverse faculty, staff, and administrators**, such as mentorship opportunities and newly hired communities, to improve retention rates.
- Provide **boards and administrators with professional development** on fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace.
- Foster **collaboration between faculty preparation programs and campuses** to effectively support the next generation of California educators.
- Empower faculty, administrators, staff, and students to **report instances of microaggression, harassment, or discrimination**, and provide safe, anonymous reporting channels. Ensure that campus policies support increased reporting.
- Collect **comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data** throughout all aspects of the employment process, and ensure that institutions track and act upon this data to address diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. Necessary data must be disaggregated and include:
  - Demographics by employee type, including interim positions and rank
  - Tenure of administrators
  - Courses taught by adjunct faculty by department
  - Investments in equal opportunity employment practices
  - Departures by department, employee type, and rank
- Hold institutional leaders responsible for developing plans outlining specific **diversity goals and strategies** to reach each goal, practicing data transparency, conducting diversity reviews/audits to identify problems, identifying staff to address problems as they arise, and incorporating progress on diversity goals into performance reviews.

### Resources Needed:

Institutions should allocate funding and staff time toward the diversity-oriented hiring and retention practices recommended. Segments and institutions also should devote resources to quantitative and qualitative data collection related to faculty, administrator, and staff diversity, and dedicate professional development to workforce data analysis and action planning, with the goal of shifting from a compliance mindset intent only on meeting legal requirements to the transformation of the system. Data should be collected during the pre-hiring, hiring, and retention stages. While some new resources will likely be required to build more robust data systems, the greatest resource required is likely to be staff time for data analysis, monitoring, and follow-up.

## RECOMMENDATION 2

### Cultivate Inclusive, Engaging, and Equity-Oriented Learning Environments

System and local boards, faculty, administrators, and staff need professional development, resources, and support to redesign the learning environment so that it better serves all learners.

#### Policy Changes at the State, Segment, and Institutional Levels:

- Enact legislation **mandating that each segment upskill all board members, staff, faculty, and administrators** with training and professional development in implicit bias, cultural competency/fluency, and effective teaching techniques for diverse learners, targeting 2022 for completion of first-round professional development.
- Empower and **incentivize faculty, staff, and administrators to diversify the curricula, incorporate career-relevant learning experiences** (such as work-based learning), and recognize progress through administrator and staff evaluations and through the faculty tenure and review processes, with a target of significant course and program redesign by 2025.
- Ensure that **programs of study incorporate on-ramps and off-ramps** for learners who must attend to other priorities (e.g., work, caregiving).

#### Practice Changes at the Segment and Institutional Levels:

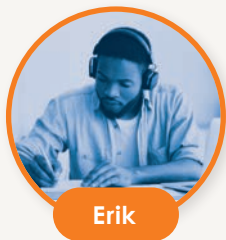
- **Re-envision curricula** across disciplines to be anti-racist and equity-centered and foster a sense of belonging among students. In partnership with faculty leaders, institutional leaders should develop metrics to monitor curriculum redesign. For example, students' course evaluations could include a question pertaining to whether the course content aligned with principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Implement **culturally competent teaching and learning practices**, which include routinely assessing instruction from a diversity, equity, and inclusion perspective.
- Incorporate **equity-centered practices** into teaching and learning, grading, annual evaluations, and faculty review/tenure processes.
- Create culturally responsive and easily accessible **channels for students to report instances of hate, discrimination, and microaggressions**, and implement restorative justice-centered practices to address those behaviors.
- Embrace teaching and learning practices based in research on **effective teaching techniques for adult learners** and that reflect and value the knowledge, skills, and experiences of adult learners.
- Include **adults and programs that focus on adults** (e.g., continuing education programs) in institutional and system goals.
- Provide the option for **competency-based courses and programs** to affirm the college and work experience of all learners.



- Integrate **work-based learning across the segments**, and throughout all disciplines, to better prepare learners for their desired careers and to make programs more relevant and responsive to learners' interests and goals. Develop metrics to track progress on implementing work-based learning.
- Engage **employers as partners and stakeholders**, not just as passive consumers, to ensure that post-secondary programs meet current and anticipated statewide and regional workforce needs; also engage these partners to provide work-based learning and teach courses.

### Resources Needed:

Existing professional development funding can be repurposed to prioritize equity-oriented training. Some new funding and considerable staff time will need to be identified to develop professional development modules, redesign curricula and courses, and draft model evaluation and tenure review processes.



### CASE EXAMPLE: WHEN EDUCATORS CAN RELATE

*When Erik registered for classes, he was glad to see that some of his professors were Black. He looked forward to taking their classes, knowing that they might be able to relate to his background and experiences as well as the many competing demands on his time. In one of his classes, Erik's professor led a discussion about implicit and explicit discrimination in healthcare, as well as the importance of healthcare workers being sensitive to the needs and concerns of the Black community. This discussion helped Erik feel seen, respected, and affirmed. By pursuing a career in nursing, Erik felt confident that he could not only support his family, but also make a difference in his community.*

## RECOMMENDATION 3

### Retain Students through Inclusive Supports

To develop an affirming and supportive culture that promotes student wellbeing and academic success, institutions must intentionally, thoughtfully, and creatively evaluate and, as necessary, redesign current support activities and develop new practices and programs.

#### Policy Changes at the State, Segment, and Institutional Levels:

- Expand programs that **promote students' representation and sense of belonging** (e.g., identity-based resource centers, outreach programs, etc.).
- Develop a **statewide approach for California students to access certain supports** (e.g., campus food pantries) regardless of campus/system affiliation.
- Review the **role of policing in higher education**, evaluating its impact on institutional culture, particularly for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students; adopt community-based approaches for addressing campus safety issues (e.g., mental health counselors, crisis response teams) as appropriate.
- Develop **research-based metrics for evaluating campus climate** and its impact on student success and retention. Examples of potential data to collect include measures of learners':
  - Sense of belonging
  - Experiences with discrimination and harassment
  - Perceptions of the degree to which the campus promotes diversity across race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability
- Hold institutional leaders and governing boards responsible for ensuring that institutions have plans outlining **specific goals for these metrics, and strategies to reach each goal**. Such plans may leverage existing campus climate data as appropriate.

#### Practice Changes at the Segment and Institutional Levels:

- Cultivate a **stronger sense of inclusion** among students by fostering opportunities for students of different backgrounds to build community with one another and by encouraging students to be better stewards of campus climate.
- Offer **academic and student support programs year-round and outside the traditional work week** to better serve learners with work or caregiving obligations.
- Foster **collaboration and alignment among student support departments** (e.g., Basic Needs and Office for Students with Disabilities) and between **student and academic affairs**.
- Empower **students to engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion** work by recognizing their expertise, providing them with mentorship, and incorporating them into decision-making (including the review of EEO plans and hiring practices).
- Empower **faculty with student support information**, integrate the information into course syllabi, and encourage appropriate referrals to campus programs and lead staff.

**Resources Needed:**

Segments and institutions will need to provide resources to support collaboration among student support services and faculty (e.g., funds for joint programming, percentages of staff time focused on establishing collaborative initiatives, etc.) and research on the impact of campus climate on student success/retention (e.g., dedicated time for existing research positions or the creation of new roles).



*“To aid California’s recovery we must uplift student voices and create equity-centered institutions of learning. At the core of this work is an ecosystem that fosters inclusive, diverse, and equity-centered teaching and learning; in other words, the cultural transformation of our higher education systems is critical. We will succeed by supporting educators to lead culturally competent learning environments and by systematically designing equity-oriented curriculum, course pathways, and student supports.”*

**— Dr. Daisy Gonzales, Taskforce Member and Deputy Chancellor,  
California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office**





# Streamlining Pathways to Degrees

*An integrated statewide system for admission and transfer to provide clear, easy-to-navigate pathways to degrees.*

## PROBLEM

**Historically, the process of applying to college has been unnecessarily complex and time-consuming, creating immense challenges for families and learners, particularly those without prior college experience.**

As a result, many learners (disproportionately Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian Pacific Islander, and adult learners) have opted not to apply to or attend colleges for which they are qualified.<sup>39</sup> Californians should not be dissuaded from applying to college, or from transferring between institutions, due to finances, family or work considerations, or bureaucratic hurdles. To reduce these challenges and address their impact on college persistence and completion, a three-pronged approach to reforming college admission and transfer is proposed.

*“I’ve had two different counselors—it depends who is looking over your curriculum, your classes, and that affects your schedule. The one I had earlier had something different planned for me than the next one. That’s one big point while transferring. I think it depends on the counselor how they explain and what resources they provide.”*

— College Student

## GOAL

**By 2030, learners will have clear, easy-to-navigate pathways into and through post-secondary education, as well as admission and transfer processes facilitated by an integrated technology platform, dual admission, and common course numbering.**

All students, but particularly Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian Pacific Islander, and adult learners, will benefit from the availability of college-going pathways that guarantee seamless integration of early college credit, dual admission, transfer, and reverse-transfer to support the timely completion of their post-secondary goals. Anchored by an integrated technology platform, learners will be supported along their individual pathways in anticipation of a college journey in which they take classes from at least two post-secondary institutions. Once established, this system will offer more effective planning for prospective students, guidance counselors, outreach programs, and admission professionals, and will also increase collaboration among institutions.

### INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY PLATFORM

*The creation of an integrated technology platform is a critical strategy referenced throughout the Taskforce's recommendations. The platform will provide learners with an easy-to-use, single point of access to applications, tools, data, resources, and digital supports across California's vast education and social services systems. Throughout this report, the numerous ways the platform can help advance equity for learners and formalize collaboration across institutions and systems are described in detail. The initial steps for developing the platform have already taken place with the state's investment in a Cradle-to-Career Data System that is integrated with the California College Guidance Initiative.*



## RECOMMENDATION 4

### Establish an Integrated Admissions Platform

California should create an integrated technology platform to streamline the currently overwhelming and excessively complex application and transfer processes. Designed well, such a platform also can help colleges and universities better manage enrollment, integrate recognition of students' existing knowledge and skills through credit for prior learning and mastery-based learning, plan for course delivery, and address capacity constraints. The development of an integrated technology platform will take extensive coordination and investment as described below.

#### Policy Changes at the State, Segment, and Institutional Levels:

- Approve the creation of an **integrated technology platform** that facilitates a common application for admission and transfer to California public institutions of higher education.
- Explore possible **legislation mandating a singular system integrated with the California College Guidance Initiative (CCGI) and the Cradle-to-Career Data System**.
- Ensure that the single platform includes a **dual admission function**.
- Develop **policy changes across community college, CSU, and UC segments** to align to a singular application system, including common admission deadlines, application requirements, etc.
- Discern a **funding formula for allocating application revenues** across parties.

#### Practice Changes at the State, Segment, and Institutional Levels (including associated platform design elements):

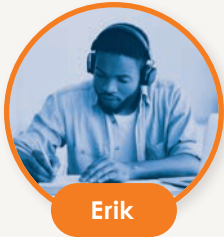
- Scaffold the integrated platform on top of an **existing system** (such as CCGI)<sup>40</sup> and align it with the statewide Cradle-to-Career Data System and its operational tools.<sup>41</sup> The platform should allow for an application/enrollment process to all public institutions in which **high school transcript data and previously earned credits at California public institutions pre-populate** into the application.
- Create a **single repository for student transcripts** across high schools, community colleges, CSU, and UC (prioritizing high schools and community colleges initially).
- Develop **intersegmental post-secondary degree program roadmaps** to promote efficient course-taking behaviors across educational sectors, and embed these roadmaps in the technology platform so learners and their advisors can plan ahead and track progress. This effort can build on the work of the CCGI.<sup>42</sup>
- Develop a **bundled application fee structure** that does not discourage learners from applying.



### Resources Needed:

Dedicated resources from the state will be needed to design and create the integrated technology platform, including software and system development to build the platform, as well as technical staff to operate the platform in collaboration with institutions. Extensive planning time also will be needed for the architects and managers of each segment's existing admissions and transfer systems to work with the developers of the integrated technology platform to design and implement back-end system integration.

Faculty and administrators from K–12 and post-secondary segments will need time to collaborate to develop intersegmental post-secondary degree roadmaps. This work could be modeled after the state's existing intersegmental coordination efforts (e.g., the K–12/ community college College and Career Access Pathways agreements and the Associate Degree for Transfer).



### CASE EXAMPLE: WHEN COURSES TRULY CONNECT

*As Erik thought about enrolling in his local community college, he wondered whether he'd be able to transfer to a CSU to complete a nursing degree. He shared his concerns with his friend Marcus who already attends community college. Marcus assured him that there had been some important changes that address just this kind of question.*

*At Marcus's urging, Erik visited the college's website. When he typed "nursing" into the search box, he was directed to a degree map that outlined the courses he could take at the community college that would transfer directly into a CSU nursing program. Encouraged, he clicked on the "apply now" button and was directed to a statewide admission platform. The admission site explained that, if he applied for dual admission and was accepted, his place on the CSU campus would be assured. A few weeks later, Erik was notified that he qualified for dual admission to the CSU. Getting into the competitive nursing program would be dependent on completing his initial courses within two years and the grades he earned at the community college, but at least he knew that if he followed the degree map and worked hard in those courses he could reach his goal of becoming a nurse.*

## RECOMMENDATION 5

### Streamline and Unify the College Admission Process

Recognizing that most learners attend more than one college in order to earn a degree, California public institutions should adopt a streamlined and unified admission process, enabled by an integrated technology platform, that provides an option for dual admission to smooth the pathway for learners who wish to attend a four-year institution but begin at a community college. Similar to the commitment community colleges have already made to dual enrollment opportunities, dual admission would incentivize community college students to enroll full-time and continuously, with the assurance that they have been accepted to a four-year college and would be prioritized for programs and services (such as priority registration) to keep them on track. The successful creation of a streamlined and unified college admission process will require collective commitments across multiple fronts.

#### Policy Changes at the State, Segment, and Institutional Levels:

- Develop a **unified admission process** for all California public post-secondary institutions.
- Require segments to create a **two-tiered, guaranteed dual admission process**<sup>43</sup> to a campus and major of choice for otherwise qualified applicants who are missing up to three courses in their A–G sequence in math or language (Tier I) or who are UC/CSU-eligible but did not apply (Tier II). Design the dual admission process to allow learners to complete their first two years at a community college with guaranteed admission to a specific UC or CSU prior to beginning their community college courses.
- Allow learners who are dually admitted to **take advantage of resources (e.g., library, gym, etc.) at the nearest UC or CSU campus** while attending a community college.
- Adopt policies, such as **priority course registration** for dual admission applicants, increasing the likelihood that learners can complete their lower division courses within two years.
- Develop a **four-year financial aid package for dually admitted students that accounts for the total cost of college attendance**, that braids together institutional, state, and federal resources, and that offers financial support predictability for learners.
- Expand **prior learning assessment and the recognition of prior learning credits** in the transfer process.<sup>44</sup>
- Enact policy that would **automatically admit high school seniors to** their local community college or workforce training program, with the option to opt out if they have other post-secondary plans in place. Based on their high school records and assessment of prior learning experience, and enabled by the integrated technology platform, proactive guidance and advising would be provided to assist students with next steps in the enrollment and registration process.

### Practice Changes at the Segment and Institutional Levels:

- Recommit to **accelerating the widespread, consistent implementation of the Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) program** as a statewide vehicle to facilitate streamlined and transparent pathways for student transfer from community college to four-year institutions.
- Target **high-impact communities for initial implementation**, including communities with high-need school districts and/or community colleges with historically low transfer rates.
- Partner with **workforce development agencies, high school counselors, and outreach programs** to identify on-track learners and equip these partners with access to a tool such as the California College Guidance Initiative (CCGI).<sup>45</sup>
- Implement **college knowledge supports and outreach** for high-potential learners and their families, including workforce training applicants and soon-to-be high school graduates.
- Synchronize **admissions and transfer timelines** across all public post-secondary institutions.

### Resources Needed:

Strategic investment to encourage the creation and adoption of a streamlined and unified admission system can begin by targeting initial implementation in high-impact communities where CCGI is well-established. This initial implementation must include outreach that is conducted by professional, community-based, multilingual champions trained in cultural competence. Expansion beyond initial implementation should occur simultaneously with the scale-up of CCGI to provide the data to help all institutions identify Tier I and Tier II learners.



Michaela

### CASE EXAMPLE: WHEN STUDENTS FIND VIABLE OPTIONS

*Michaela found out that her local community college had an advisor who could help her get college credit for the training she received in her job at the daycare center. She was skeptical, but made an appointment. When she arrived, she was surprised to see plenty of older students on campus. The advisor explained that there were several ways Michaela could earn college credit both for the formal courses she had taken and by demonstrating her knowledge and skills. The advisor also showed how the courses she could take at the community college would transfer directly into a B.A. program that could lead to a teaching credential. Michaela was especially happy to see that, with an associate's degree, she could qualify for a teacher's aide position at a public school. This job would provide much better benefits than her current one and still give her time to care for her daughter. Later, when her daughter starts kindergarten, Michaela could think about continuing on for her bachelor's degree and teaching credential.*

## RECOMMENDATION 6

### Develop a Common Course Numbering System

To streamline transfer from two- to four-year institutions and reduce excess credit accumulation, California's community colleges must adopt a common course numbering system, starting with general education requirements and eventually expanding to transfer pathway courses. The aim would be to align all community college courses so that students transferring to four-year institutions know, as they are pursuing their courses, that they are meeting the requirements of the receiving institutions. General education courses would be targeted for common course numbering by 2023, while transfer pathway courses would be targeted for 2025. The effort to establish a common course numbering system will be extensive, requiring a multi-level, sequenced approach. The development of common course numbering would also help to facilitate reverse-transfer.

#### Policy Changes at the State, Segment, and Institutional Levels:

- Mandate that **community colleges work together** to develop a common course numbering system to facilitate transfer and reverse transfer.
- Create a **standard for transferring between semester and quarter units**.
- **Tie funding to courses** in the community colleges that are a part of the common course numbering system with clear pathways into CSU and UC.



### Practice Changes at the Segment and Institutional Levels:

- Foster institutional collaboration to **create standards for common courses**, as well as a “rubric” for more specialized courses, to ensure course credits are properly recognized and accepted across institutions.
- Encourage **communication and regional partnerships** to ensure that community college-CSU/UC articulation agreements are updated in real time with course numbering changes.
- Align **regional institutional offices to create seamless processes** for learners moving throughout regional systems and to help keep regional systems working in sync.

### Resources Needed:

Time will be the most valuable resource needed to develop a common course numbering system, including time for community college faculty to agree on course equivalencies and for institutions to align curriculum changes to allow for smooth transitions. In addition, institutions will need time to train counseling and admission staff to leverage the common course numbering system in order to make course equivalence and certificate/degree awarding processes automatic.



*We must tackle the systemic barriers that students face when matriculating through California's systems of higher education by utilizing existing and emerging technologies and resources. By recognizing the new reality for the majority of California's students that are increasingly diverse and intersectional, the erosion of these barriers is critical to an equitable recovery from the inequitable impacts that the pandemic continues to have on our students."*

— **Michael Wiafe, Taskforce Member and Former President of the California State Student Association**



# Facilitating Student Transitions

*High-touch, high-tech guidance and improved academic preparation for college access and success.*

## PROBLEM

**For K–12 learners in California, inadequate college preparation, limited advising and access to college information, and constrained access to early college experiences are key contributors to equity gaps.<sup>46</sup>**

Advising is limited at many public high schools, so students are often left to identify their academic and career interests and to navigate the college admission process on their own. In 2018–19, the student-to-counselor ratio in California was 612-to-1, well above the national average of 430-to-1 and the recommended ratio of 250-to-1.<sup>47</sup> The A–G course system makes it easier for students to identify courses that will qualify for UC and CSU admission, but access to these courses is limited at many California high schools. Because of these challenges, only half of California high school graduates complete the A–G course requirements necessary for admission to UC and CSU, and Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and some sub-groups of Asian Pacific Islander learners have significantly lower rates of A–G completion than their peers.<sup>48</sup>

Some high school learners gain early college exposure and earn early college credit—which is associated with positive outcomes including high school completion, college entry, improved college performance, credit accumulation, and degree attainment<sup>49</sup>—but many learners lack access to these early college opportunities and the benefits they confer.<sup>50</sup>



These challenges continue into higher education, where it can be difficult for students to choose an academic program and navigate the many rules and requirements, necessary forms, and deadlines. Beyond managing the college bureaucracy, students need to know that they have a knowledgeable, caring advisor to whom they can turn when they encounter difficulties.

Many of the obstacles students face can be addressed through greater K–12 accountability for college readiness, stronger advising in K–12 and higher education, and more opportunities for learners to experience college while still in high school.<sup>51</sup> If California does not address these institutional and informational barriers, thousands of learners across the state will be deprived of the opportunity and support needed to earn a post-secondary credential. This is all the more important to pandemic recovery as obstacles have been heightened and many learners and their families face even greater financial insecurity.

*“At my school we only have two counselors, one for every two grade levels. We have 500 students total. Those counselors are really packed with a lot of work. It’s hard to keep in touch with them and difficult to get information you need. I can reach out to the counselor, but the ability to communicate with counselors is really rare at my school right now.”*

— High School Student

## GOAL

**By 2030, learners in all public schools will have access to college preparatory coursework; early college experiences; and a high-tech, high-touch advising system that supports their success from middle school and high school into and through higher education and into the workforce.<sup>52</sup>**

Students require a combination of rigorous and relevant academic preparation and proactive support and advising to meet their academic and career goals. Improving college access and success and closing equity gaps in degree attainment require expansion of college preparatory course-taking and early college experiences, paired with state-of-the-art advising that blends data and technology with proactive, personalized support. An effective system such as this would start in middle school and continue through post-secondary.

## RECOMMENDATION 7

### Provide High-Tech, High-Touch Advising

The integrated technology platform (referenced in previous recommendations in this report), paired with a statewide chatbot accessible 24/7 via the web and mobile devices, would allow advisors to provide data-driven, high-tech, high-touch advising to support middle school, high school, and college learners on their pathways to degrees. The platform will ensure that middle school, high school, and college learners (and those who support them) can access all the information they need regarding students' educational records, college preparation, enrollment, financial aid, and progress toward a degree. The chatbot will use this information to identify and help students resolve routine problems, freeing up advisors to provide proactive, personal support.

#### Policy Changes at the State, Segment, and Institutional Levels:

- Establish policies to create a statewide **integrated technology platform with a connected chatbot** that ensures middle school, high school, and college learners and their supporters can access critical information. This strategy builds on the groundbreaking work of Georgia State University, which has established national best practices for leveraging data and technology to improve student experiences and outcomes.<sup>53</sup> This technology will free up advisor capacity for important one-on-one advising of students.
- Create **integrated advising tools** within the technology platform and chatbot. These tools include an advisor-facing interface that helps advisors monitor their advisees' progress along personal, academic, and career goals, fueled by artificial intelligence (AI) technology that leverages predictive analytics to notify advisors when students get off track or have an important task coming up.<sup>54</sup>
- Establish a plan to assign learners most in need to a **professionally trained advisor**—beginning in middle school and lasting through college—who will provide encouragement and authoritative advice to facilitate their paths to high-quality post-secondary credentials.<sup>55</sup>



### Practice Changes at the State, Segment, and Institutional Levels:

- Ensure the platform and chatbot **leverage data to proactively provide high-tech, high-touch personalized support** to learners in middle school through college.<sup>56</sup>
- Design the integrated technology platform and chatbot so that **learners and their parents will be able to track progress to and through college** and find/ask for the information they need, which will, in turn, provide data for targeted messaging from the chatbot (and for some learners, targeted interventions from advisors) to encourage the timely completion of critical tasks and processes.
- Make the chatbot available through the technology platform and via **texting platforms** on users' phones, so they are able to send and receive messages directly as texts.
- Using artificial intelligence, send **“personalized” nudges to learners in targeted populations** (e.g., learners who have not submitted a form, failed to register for classes, or who are eligible for a scholarship or study abroad experience), with learners having the ability to ask immediate follow-up questions and receive automated, clarifying answers.
- **Customize the knowledge base for the chatbot** so that it provides higher-level answers that pertain to all post-secondary segments, provides more specific answers that pertain to particular institutions, and uses AI to target answers to learners based on their specific characteristics (e.g., region, grades, major, college campus, financial circumstances, etc.).
- Deploy the technology platform and chatbot to support **virtual one-to-one advising appointments** and to uniformly connect with K–12, community college, and four-year university technology platforms to foster a data-driven, collaborative, case-management approach to advising California learners.

### Resources Needed:

Building the integrated statewide technology platform and chatbot—and embedding advising tools within the technology—will require a significant startup investment along with ongoing financial support for system updates and maintenance. Technology costs increase with the potency of the tool: For instance, it is less expensive to deploy a chatbot that provides all students the same answer to the same question, and more costly but also more impactful to deploy a chatbot that deeply taps into data systems and uses AI to provide customized answers to questions based on students' individual characteristics. A core team of full-time staff will be needed to manage the integrated technology platform and chatbot on a daily basis, with professional experts in communication and social media approaches needed to supplement the technology team in the daily running of the platforms. Content experts from campuses, including faculty and learners, can be deployed to provide content and messaging and to maintain and update the chatbot's knowledge base.

With regard to advisors, assuming a 250-to-1 student-to-advisor ratio, a diverse group of roughly 2,000 advisors will be needed to provide support to 500,000 students deemed to be most in need of high-touch advising, and a small staff team will be needed to manage and support this network of advisors. A plan must be established for setting up and financing this system of advisors, created in partnership by K–12 and post-secondary systems.

## RECOMMENDATION 8

### Support College Preparation and Early Credit

Completing a college preparatory curriculum is important for high school learners' ability to transition and succeed in post-secondary education. A–G course completion sets learners up to be eligible for admission to CSU and UC, and earning early college credit—for example, through dual enrollment—not only gives learners credit toward a post-secondary degree but can also instill confidence in their ability to be successful in college. K–12 and post-secondary education should work together to make A–G coursework the default high school curriculum, strengthen K–12 accountability for college preparation, and expand access to early college experiences.

#### Policy Changes at the State, Segment, and Institutional Levels:

- Strengthen **K–12 accountability for post-secondary preparation** using the College and Career Indicator (CCI)<sup>57</sup> to measure schools' success in college preparation, including A–G completion and default scheduling, AP course-taking, and other early college credit opportunities.<sup>58</sup> As recommended in a recent report by the Education Commission of the States, “Organizations will pay the most attention to the measures they are required to report. With that in mind, states' departments of education could include measures of college and career readiness on district and school report cards.”<sup>59</sup>
- Establish a plan to make **A–G coursework the default high school curriculum for all students**, with alternate programs available for students who choose to opt out of a college preparatory pathway.<sup>60</sup>
- Expand **early college credit opportunities**. Building on California's AB 288,<sup>61</sup> allow college classes to be taught on high school campuses exclusively for high school students and create College and Career Access Pathways (CCAP) partnerships between community college districts and high schools to offer dual enrollment courses that count for both a high school diploma and an associate's degree.

#### Practice Changes at the Segment and Institutional Levels:

- Provide **robust professional development** for faculty, administrators, and staff of middle schools, high schools, community colleges, and universities to improve college and career preparation, use of data, and advising.
- Establish **K–12/higher education teams to identify and dismantle barriers to A–G and early college course completion** for all learners, including constraints with regard to scheduling, instruction, and counselors.

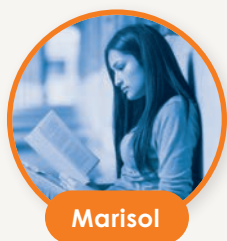


*“To reduce inequality in educational attainment we must better align our systems of education, reduce information barriers, and improve support for students navigating the road to a college degree.”*

— Michal Kurlaender, Taskforce Member and Professor and Department Chair, University of California, Davis, School of Education

## Resources Needed:

Dramatically increasing student participation in college preparatory courses will require resources to support K–12 teachers over an extended timeframe, especially given that students' eligibility for college preparatory courses is often determined by their experiences in elementary and middle school. To begin that process, resources will be needed to convene administrators and faculty from K–12 and post-secondary education, first at the state level and then locally, to determine the professional development, staffing, and other changes necessary to enable broad-based expansion of A–G course-taking. Similarly, staff from high schools and community colleges will require time to address barriers to expanded early college enrollment.



Marisol

### CASE EXAMPLE: WHEN HELP IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE

*One day, Marisol is pulled out of class to attend a meeting in her high school guidance office. Worried that she is somehow in trouble, Marisol is relieved—and excited—to learn that she has been selected for a new program that will provide her with a dedicated advisor. She soon gets an email inviting her to meet virtually with her coach, Ms. Rodriguez.*

*At the meeting, Marisol tells Ms. Rodriguez about her dream of becoming a mechanical engineer and confides in her, asking questions about affording UC and being prepared for such a rigorous program. Ms. Rodriguez shows Marisol a degree map listing all the courses she should take in high school and the courses she will have to complete in college to earn an engineering degree. The advisor notes that there are several classes offered through the dual enrollment program with the local community college that meet the A–G admission requirements and will count toward an engineering degree. Ms. Rodriguez also shares that taking these courses will help Marisol decide whether engineering is right for her and may help her feel more confident in her preparation to succeed in that pathway. Before the meeting ends, Ms. Rodriguez shows Marisol how to establish an account on the statewide integrated technology platform. She explains that, not only is this the place to fill out her college application, it is also a means to find information, ask questions, and plan her next steps, which she can even do through an app and chatbot she can access on her phone. Soon after she signs up, Marisol receives a text about a financial aid information night that will be conducted in Spanish; she shows the text to her mom, who is relieved to know that college is within reach.*



# Simplifying Supports for Student Stability

*Resources and structures packaged and simplified to help students meet basic, digital, and financial aid needs.*

## PROBLEM

**One of the greatest challenges during the pandemic is that learners cannot adequately focus on learning because they must focus on meeting their basic needs.<sup>62</sup>**

These needs include food, housing, and access to technology necessary for college participation, as well as other foundational services such as transportation and dependent care. These challenges reduce the odds of college entry and completion for many learners, particularly those who stand to benefit the most from college attainment—hindering both individual economic mobility and the state’s ability to recover from the pandemic-induced recession.

Basic needs security requires “an ecosystem that supports financial stability by ensuring equitable access to nutritious and sufficient food; safe, secure, and adequate housing (to sleep, study, cook, and shower); healthcare to promote sustained mental and physical wellbeing; affordable transportation; resources for personal hygiene care; and emergency needs for students with dependents.”<sup>63</sup>



The definition above from the University of California provides a thoughtful foundation for supporting learner needs. To further strengthen and update it for us across segments, it should be adapted to add the requirements of digital equity: affordable and reliable internet access as well as the technology devices needed for learning, particularly in light of the pandemic's implications for education.<sup>64</sup> Prior to the pandemic, the inability to consistently attend classes in person due to transportation issues led to students dropping out, failing to complete their coursework, and/or struggling to maintain good attendance. In the pandemic era, it is access to sufficient and reliable internet service that makes the difference. The effects of being unable to access the class, course, or instruction are the same. Support for both will be critical as pandemic recovery takes hold.

The Newsom Administration led public-private partnerships raising a total of \$3.9 billion in corporate and philanthropic funding during the first eight months of the pandemic to support Californians' basic needs.<sup>65</sup> In addition, the Governor's 2021–2022 budget proposes to invest \$100 million in one-time funds and \$105 million in ongoing funds to support basic needs at the public segments. While these investments are impressive, a more systematized ongoing approach to meeting basic needs for California post-secondary learners who qualify is necessary in the long term. Without it, students are making difficult short-term choices to stop out of higher education or delay enrollment.

Finally, state and federal student financial aid amounts have not kept pace with the increased costs of student basic needs, especially in high-cost areas of the state. The need-based Cal Grant is primarily designed to support tuition costs, leaving basic need costs to be covered from other funds (e.g., federal Pell Grants, student employment, and student loans).<sup>66</sup> Efforts to increase financial aid have been welcome, but more needs to be done to maximize the flexibility to address ongoing severe basic needs challenges, such as doubling the Pell Grant.<sup>67</sup> Without all students completing the FAFSA or CADAA form before leaving high school, however, California will have only a partial picture of what that focus could accomplish.

*"I know the school is doing a lot, like providing WiFi. But some families just can't afford it. How can we expect students to do well when their WiFi is cutting off, they're missing lectures, or they're getting kicked out of Zoom meetings."*

— College Student

## GOAL

**By 2030, learners will receive support to meet basic needs through a simplified, integrated system that enables qualified college students to access California’s social services, subsidized internet and technology, and increased financial aid.**

Proactively supporting the basic needs of California college students can allow learners to prioritize focusing on their education, but it requires delivering that support differently. By working together across social service agencies, institutions, and regional/local partners, and by automating enrollment in these services, California can create a seamless system for qualified college students to access the state’s robust social services (e.g., CalFresh; housing programs; healthcare, including mental health; direct aid; subsidized childcare; transportation; etc.) as well as federal, state, and institutional financial aid.

Meeting students’ needs also requires treating access to fast, reliable, and low-cost internet as a basic need, legally and culturally, just as transportation to and from campus has been supported in the past.

Finally, California must create a pathway whereby learners can complete post-secondary education without having to take on additional debt, through a combination of refocusing and increasing student financial aid.

## RECOMMENDATION 9

### **Integrate Platform of State Services for Students**

Historically, students apply for financial aid as their main support to defray college expenses. But that solves only part of the challenge. Using the integrated platform previously described in this report, students could submit their financial aid application once and receive, in return, the full suite of supports for which they qualify (e.g., financial aid, CalFresh, housing programs, healthcare, mental healthcare, subsidized childcare, transportation, internet/technology access support, etc.). A unified application process would provide students with a complete picture of how they can earn a credential or degree and also ensure that their basic needs—and those of their family—can be met. This eliminates the need for students to apply separately for every support service they may need.

This integrated system also would provide all students, families, and advisors with a simplified, low-burden approach for completing the FAFSA and the California Dream Act Application (CADAA) prior to high school graduation and return timely information to support their next steps. Some of the services could be delivered directly from the state, and others—such mental health and counseling services—may be coordinated and delivered locally on campus or in the community where a student lives or attends class. This integrated and automated platform, which would combine financial aid and social service access with college application and advising as recommended in this report, can become a powerful one-stop shop for high school and post-secondary students and families.

### Policy Changes at the State, Segment, and Institutional Levels:

- Building on the early work of the CalFresh Work Group, create a multi-agency taskforce to identify any **existing legal barriers** (California or federal) to granting college students the ability to access the full suite of support services and **align these findings with the creation of the integrated Cradle-to-Career Data System** to ensure all institutions—K–12 education, post-secondary education, health services, human services, and others—are better able to **help students qualify for and use government support programs** to effectively access and complete their educations.
- Enable students to submit a **single application to access basic needs services alongside financial aid**. This will require data integration and data sharing across numerous local state and federal programs and agencies.
- Automate eligibility for services by **pre-populating the application** based on family income tax data and the Cradle-to-Career Data System.<sup>68</sup>

### Practice Changes at the State, Segment, and Institutional Levels:

- Determine the **extent to which student/family data submitted via the FAFSA or the CADAA is sufficient** to apply for and receive other state, local, and federal services. The multi-agency taskforce will identify any deficiencies in the FAFSA or CADAA to serve this added purpose and recommend solutions that provide the greatest ease for students and families.
- Build partnerships between post-secondary institutions, state agencies offering services, and **local community agencies, nonprofits, and employers** to communicate and coordinate service delivery locally for eligible students as appropriate.
- Design user-friendly **reports that clearly and succinctly communicate what financial and basic needs supports learners are eligible for** and identify contacts for learners seeking additional help in filling any remaining gaps of support that would prevent them from applying and enrolling.

### Resources Needed:

Resources required include significant dedicated staff time for the multi-agency taskforce. This taskforce would identify legal barriers and priority functionality for the integrated technology platform. It would determine what information (from the Cradle-to-Career Data System, state tax data, and financial aid databases) is required with a single application. The taskforce would also define the characteristics of the user interface and student reports. Funds will be required for technical experts to advise on and construct a user-friendly interface, integrate the data needed to produce individualized reports, and deliver reports to students in a secure fashion.

Institutions will need to assign staff to build partnerships with local agencies and service providers that bolster basic needs supports that the state may not provide. Institutions will also need to deploy staff to train advisors to engage with students on their individualized support package.

## RECOMMENDATION 10

### Subsidize Internet Access for Eligible Students

To provide subsidized access to reliable internet service for students who need it, this strategy calls for expanding the amount of funds offered through Cal Grant B and working with internet service providers to ensure they are offering their low-cost plans to all students who qualify for state or federal financial aid. This work builds on and amplifies the significant effort begun early in the pandemic, and it aims to institutionalize internet access as a basic need for learners. It also intersects with the recommendations of the *California Broadband for All*<sup>69</sup> report issued in late 2020.

#### Policy Changes at the State, Segment, and Institutional Levels:

- Consider any **statutory changes necessary to mandate student access to low-cost technology/internet access programs** for students who qualify state and/or federal financial aid.
- Consider increasing the **stipend portion of Cal Grant B** to accommodate technology-related costs.



### Practice Changes at the State, Segment, and Institutional Levels:

- Explore partnerships with California's internet service and technology providers to offer **low- to no-cost technology access to college students with demonstrable need**, including promoting existing state contractual vehicles with internet service providers and equipment vendors to support cost savings and efficient purchasing of broadband services by local public entities.<sup>70</sup> This would be accomplished working through the California Broadband Council.
- Partner with internet service providers to **promote, track, and publicly report the progress of adoption of affordable internet services and devices** throughout the state (includes developing tools for low-income individuals and service organizations to identify and subscribe to affordable broadband plans).<sup>71</sup> This would be accomplished working through the California Broadband Council.
- Explore partnerships with local and county agencies and providers (e.g., libraries) to **expand WiFi and technology access in unserved and underserved geographic areas** in the immediate term. For some areas, it will be necessary for institutions to explore and adopt innovative technology and new partnership solutions to establish WiFi and technology access.

### Resources Needed:

The resources required for this strategy include dedicated staff time for post-secondary segments and/or institutions to participate in California Broadband deliberations and understand the options for partnership and purchasing. The work also demands dedicated staff time and modeling expertise to explore the implications and options for using Cal Grant B to support internet and device subsidies, and to determine if there are other funding sources that can be leveraged. Identifying and considering any needed statutory changes also will require staff time and conversations with leadership.

At the institutional level, it will be important to have dedicated staff assigned to exploring local partnership support for short-term efforts and determining which tools and purchasing opportunities (that might be developed through the Broadband Council) are available. The effort may require additional funds to make basic technology available at little to no cost for students who qualify.

## RECOMMENDATION 11

### Improve College Affordability

California would benefit from expanding opportunities for financial aid, including the opportunity to more robustly engage students in work opportunities (federal work study and others) that allow students to reduce their reliance on loans, gain relevant work experience, and earn their way forward with a reasonable workload that supports their academic progress. The California Student Loan and Debt Service Review Workgroup is already exploring creation of a pathway for learners to complete post-secondary education without having to take on additional debt, through a combination of refocusing and increasing student financial aid.

#### Policy Changes at the State, Segment, and Institutional Levels:

- Engage the Governor, state legislative leaders, California's congressional delegation, and its higher education and business leadership in a coordinated campaign to advocate **doubling the maximum federal Pell Grant and funding for the Federal Work Study (FWS) program**. Work to refine the distribution formula such that community colleges—many of which currently receive a disproportionately low amount of FWS relative to the significant numbers of low-income students they serve in California—receive a fair share of distributed funds.<sup>72</sup>
- Develop a **Cal Grant policy that provides equity for students by focusing award levels commensurate with the real cost of attendance** for students with demonstrated need. Design the policy to keep pace with the real cost of attendance.<sup>73</sup>
- Expand **paid internships and experiential education pilot programs**, such as the California Department of Public Health and California State University Internship Program.

#### Practice Changes at the Segment and Institutional Levels:

- Expand **campus-based employment and create a campus “minimum wage,”** which will enable students to meet a large percentage of their “self-help requirement” while maintaining a reasonable workload and not straining their academic progress.



*“Meeting basic needs is essential to helping students to be students first, creating a path for all to achieve their full academic potential. Removing barriers and streamlining access to existing services, coupled with a strong commitment to student financial aid, will bring greater opportunity for countless individuals and benefit the entire state. Best of all, these goals are within reach if the state commits to a focused, consistent effort.”*

— G. Gabrielle Starr, Taskforce Member and President, Pomona College



### Resources Needed:

Resources required for this strategy include time and people to design and implement the federal advocacy campaign, as well as additional data analysis to inform suggested changes in the distribution formula. Funds may be necessary for the California Student Aid Commission to convene and support an advisory group on refining and refocusing the Cal Grant program and for data modeling to understand options and likely outcomes of changes that group considers. Funds and staffing will be required to convene program directors, elevate best practices, and identify scaling opportunities for paid internships and experiential education pilot programs, as well as to support exploration of a campus minimum wage. Funds may be available through a combination of federal, state, and private philanthropic support<sup>74</sup> to accomplish this work.



### CASE EXAMPLE: WHEN STUDENTS CAN PLAN ON SUPPORT

*When Erik submitted his admission application, he was directed to complete something called the “FAFSA Comprehensive Student Needs Assessment.” With his mom’s help, he was able to authorize access to his parents’ tax records so the system would have information on the family’s income. After he answered several more questions, the system returned a report. Erik was surprised to see that in addition to showing how much financial aid he could get (he was happy to see the amount of Pell and Cal Grant funds he qualified to receive), the report also identified other benefits he could access, including CalFresh and a subsidy to help him pay for high-speed internet. Once admitted to the community college, Erik learned about additional local support services he was eligible to receive, such as mental health counseling provided through one of his community college’s partner organizations.*

## Next Steps

The Taskforce's recommendations are rich and complex, reflecting the needs of California's diverse population, the issues and challenges identified through stakeholder research, and the varied experiences and expertise of Taskforce members. Together, these recommendations create a powerful blueprint for California's higher education system to recover from the pandemic with equity at the forefront of all its activities. At this extraordinarily challenging moment in America's history, these recommendations may also seem daunting. How can California embark on such an ambitious agenda?

### Stakeholder Opportunities for Action

The answer to the question posed above lies with the commitment, drive, and creativity of Californians. From the Governor and legislators to faculty and students, many stakeholders have important roles to play in enacting these recommendations. As the Governor and the Governor's Council for Post-Secondary Education consider the Taskforce's recommendations, the following steps are offered as a starting point for key stakeholders to consider:

- **State Policymakers:** Pass legislation and prioritize resources to enact the recommendations. Hold segment leaders accountable for bringing the recommendations to fruition. Serve as public champions for the recommendations and support segment leaders as they negotiate change management.
- **Segment Leaders (senior leadership and boards):** Develop statewide and segment plans for implementing the recommendations, including metrics to monitor progress and accountability for results. As necessary, establish statewide working groups that bring together stakeholders and experts to design new systems, programs, and services. Adjust segment policies and strategic plans to incorporate the recommendations.
- **Institution Leaders (senior leadership, local boards, and administrators):** Integrate implementation of the recommendations into campus strategic plans and re-allocate staff and funds to support the work. Monitor progress and hold personnel accountable. Ensure that faculty and students play an integral role in implementation efforts.
- **Faculty and Staff:** Participate actively in professional development as well as curriculum and program redesign, incorporating input from students and employers. Embrace new teaching, learning, and advising techniques that better serve diverse learners. Collaborate across segments, campuses, academic departments, and student affairs to actively support students.
- **Students/Student Associations:** Advocate for the implementation of the recommendations before institutional, segment, and state leaders. Provide candid, direct, and ongoing input to all efforts to create a more inclusive campus culture; to streamline admission, financial aid, and transfer; and to improve college preparation and advising. Take full advantage of new opportunities as the recommendations are implemented.

- **K–12 Education Leaders:** Collaborate with post-secondary education colleagues to make college preparation the norm for K–12 students, expand early college credit opportunities, and strengthen advising. Partner in the process to streamline college admissions.
- **Business Community:** Participate in ongoing dialogue and collaboration with higher education leaders to help post-secondary education, at both the regional and state levels, make strategic adjustments to align with anticipated shifts in industry and workforce needs. Offer work-based learning opportunities, create more high-road jobs for graduates from diverse backgrounds, and build public support for the Taskforce's recommendations.
- **Nonprofit Organization Leaders:** Contribute perspectives and expertise to the development of the integrated technology platform, revamped admission and financial aid processes, and new advising services. Help ensure student, parent, and community input into plans for implementing the recommendations. Provide ongoing feedback on how well new programs and services are serving constituents.
- **Philanthropy:** Serve as conveners and trusted partners to support stakeholders as they wrestle with implementing the Taskforce's recommendations. Invest in elements of the recommendations where they align with mission and priorities. Hold leaders at all levels accountable by monitoring progress and identifying areas that need attention. Document, elevate, and celebrate progress on implementing the Taskforce's recommendations and eliminating equity gaps.



# Potential Outcome Measures

The Taskforce's recommendations are based on research and experience with regard to the interventions necessary for student success. Implementing these recommendations with fidelity should, over time, significantly reduce equity gaps in educational attainment and result in improvements in economic mobility for Californians who have not shared in the state's economic prosperity.

As stakeholders do this work, a core set of outcome measures will track whether their efforts are improving the college experience and closing gaps in preparation, access, transfer, and degree attainment. **These measures will need to be disaggregated by segment, institution, and student race/ethnicity, age, and other characteristics to ensure that the recommendations result in improved outcomes for priority student populations.**

Potential outcome measures to consider may include:

GUIDING PRINCIPLE	2030 GOAL	MEASURES OF EQUITY
 <p><b>Fostering Inclusive Institutions</b></p>	<p>Learners of all backgrounds will report that they are valued, supported, and affirmed at their institutions; that faculty are adept at creating courses that are responsive to and build upon the unique experiences, needs, and talents of all learners; and that post-secondary institutions actively support their academic success and career readiness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student surveys on campus climate</li> <li>• Student retention</li> <li>• Changes to academic programs and course descriptions</li> <li>• Faculty and department chair survey on curricula and teaching and learning</li> </ul>

*Continued on next page*

**GUIDING PRINCIPLE****2030 GOAL****MEASURES OF EQUITY**

**Streamlining Pathways  
to Degrees**

Learners will have clear, easy-to-navigate pathways into and through post-secondary education, as well as admission and transfer processes facilitated by an integrated technology platform, dual admission, and common course numbering.

- Enrollment and retention rates
- Dual enrollment and transfer
- Time and credits to degree
- Graduation rates



**Facilitating Student  
Transitions**

Learners in all public schools will have access to college preparatory coursework; early college experiences; and a high-tech, high-touch advising system that supports their success from middle school and high school into and through higher education.

- A–G course completion rates
- Early college credit participation
- College enrollment and success rates of recent high school graduates



**Simplifying Supports  
for Student Stability**

Learners will receive support to meet basic needs through a simplified, integrated system that enables qualified college students to access California's social services, subsidized internet and technology, and increased financial aid.

- Student participation in social service programs
- Student reports of food and housing insecurity and digital access
- Unmet financial need and student indebtedness



## Parting Reflection

Throughout its history, California has been a beacon of opportunity, attracting people from around the country and around the world. While many have used the state's extraordinary higher education system as a springboard to achieve their dreams, too often the promise of California has gone unfulfilled. The dual crises of the pandemic and racial injustice have laid bare these inequities in the starkest terms, with Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian Pacific Islander communities most severely impacted. If California hopes to recover, it can do so by only addressing these persistent and growing inequities head-on.

Thankfully, there is hope. California has everything it needs to meet this challenge: a creative, vibrant, and diverse population; committed leadership in the public and private sectors; and institutions with a long history of innovation and achievement. California's system of higher education is an extraordinary asset that can be leveraged to provide real opportunity to all Californians. New leadership and priorities at the federal level—including a notable focus on community colleges—promises renewed attention to the challenges and opportunities we face. By working together to make the system more accessible, welcoming, and responsive to the needs and ambitions of all learners, Californians can ensure that the Golden State will fulfill its enduring promise to current and future generations.





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# Acknowledgements

- 77 Working Group Members
- 78 Stakeholder Participants
- 82 Focus Group Participants
- 83 Technical Advisors



## Working Group Members

The Taskforce wishes to thank some of the state's leading post-secondary and workforce experts, listed here, who brainstormed and developed solutions to address critical equity issues as part of California Higher Education Recovery with Equity Taskforce working groups.

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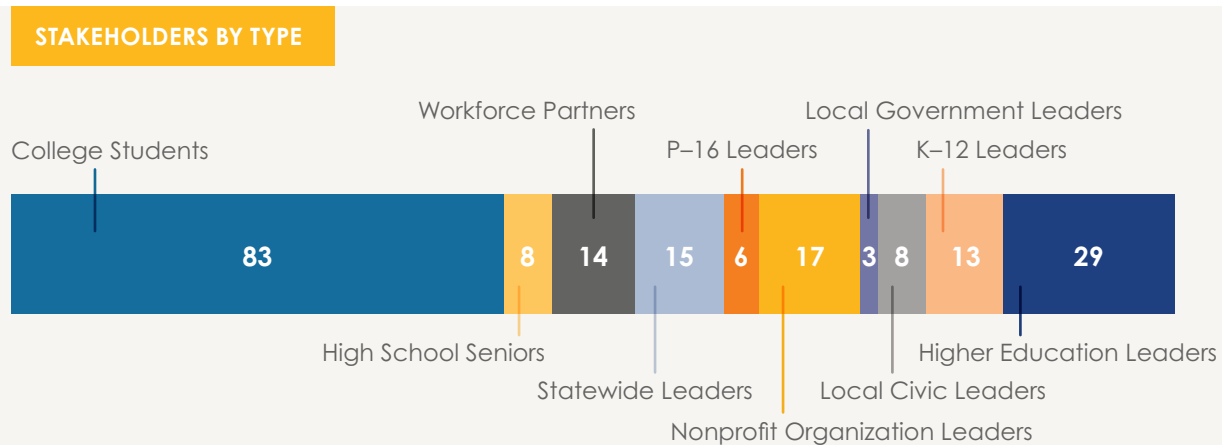
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## Focus Group Participants

The Recovery with Equity Taskforce thanks the schools, colleges, universities, and nonprofit organizations that assisted with recruiting students and parents to participate in the focus groups that informed its recommendations. The Taskforce is also deeply grateful to the 91 students and parents who candidly shared their experiences and perspectives.

### 10,000 Degrees

Avenal High School,  
Reef Sunset Unified School District

Berkeley City College

California State University,  
Bakersfield

California State University,  
Fresno

California State University,  
Los Angeles

California State University,  
Northridge

California State University,  
San Bernardino

California State University,  
Stanislaus

Central Valley Higher  
Education Consortium

College of Marin

College of the Sequoias

Corazon Healdsburg

Foothill College

Imperial Valley College

LA College Promise

La Sierra University

Los Angeles Community  
College District

### Making Hope Happen Foundation

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Cutler-Orosi Joint Unified School District

Promise Scholars

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San Francisco State University

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The Taskforce wishes to thank the following individuals who served as technical advisors throughout the course of this effort.

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# Appendix

**85 Recommendations at a Glance**

**86 Taskforce Equity Framework**

**87 Related Reports**

## Recommendations at a Glance

The Recovery with Equity Taskforce developed recommendations to advance four guiding principles. These recommendations are a set of interconnected and interdependent systemic solutions meant to fundamentally change the way California supports all of its residents in equitably preparing for and engaging in education and careers.



### Fostering Inclusive Institutions

*Institutional cultures and approaches to teaching and learning that work for all learners, especially those left behind.*

1. Improve Faculty, Staff, and Administrator Diversity
  2. Cultivate Inclusive, Engaging, and Equity-Oriented Learning Environments
  3. Retain Students through Inclusive Supports
- 



### Streamlining Pathways to Degrees

*An integrated statewide system for admission and transfer to provide clear, easy-to-navigate pathways to degrees.*

4. Establish an Integrated Admissions Platform
  5. Streamline and Unify the College Admission Process
  6. Develop a Common Course Numbering System
- 



### Facilitating Student Transitions

*High-touch, high-tech guidance and improved academic preparation for college access and success.*

7. Provide High-Tech, High-Touch Advising
  8. Support College Preparation and Early Credit
- 



### Simplifying Supports for Student Stability

*Resources and structures packaged and simplified to help students meet basic, digital, and financial aid needs.*

9. Integrate Platform of State Services for Students
10. Subsidize Internet Access for Eligible Students
11. Improve College Affordability

## Taskforce Equity Framework

The Recovery with Equity Taskforce began its work by discussing a vision of recovery for post-secondary education in California and establishing the following set of equity commitments for each phase of the Taskforce process.

### The commitments that will hold us accountable to an equity-centered process.

---

#### Vision-Setting

We will agree to a shared understanding of **equity representation** and priority **stakeholder groups** in the development of an **equity-focused process**.

---

#### Research Collection and Data

We will collect **disaggregated data** and identify the impact of current strategies, policies, and programs on **priority stakeholder groups**.

---

#### Stakeholder Engagement

We will conduct multiple **regionally based virtual conversations** with stakeholders to better understand and incorporate the experience of those most proximate to the problem.

---

#### Solution Development

We will assign more weight in our coherence strategies to **strategies expected to have the greatest impact on equity** for the priority stakeholder groups of Black, Latinx, Asian Pacific Islander, Indigenous, and adult students in California.

---

#### Recommendations and Dissemination

We will **prioritize the needs of priority stakeholder groups** regarding policy, implementation capacity, and resource allocation, and ensure Taskforce recommendations are **accessible** to all stakeholders.

---

#### User-Centered Design



Stakeholders consulted

#### Co-Design



Stakeholders part of design team

#### User-Created Design

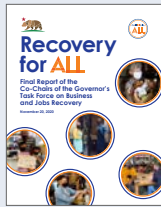


Stakeholders as designers

*Spectrum of design power dynamics, from the equityXdesign Collaborative*

## Related Reports

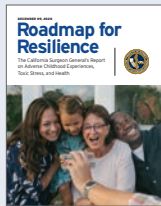
This report and its recommendations should be considered in context of a number of recent reports recommending reforms to rebuild and strengthen California's economy. These include:



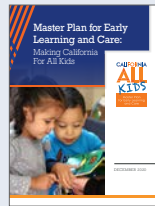
[Recovery for All: Final Report of the Co-Chairs of the Governor's Task Force on Business and Jobs Recovery](#)  
(released November 2020)



[State of California Social Innovation Report](#)  
(released November 2020)



[Roadmap for Resilience: The California Surgeon General's Report on Adverse Childhood Experiences, Toxic Stress, and Health](#)  
(released December 2020)



[Master Plan for Early Learning and Care: Making California For All Kids](#)  
(released December 2020)



[Cradle-to-Career Data System Legislative Report](#)  
(released December 2020)



[California Broadband For All: Broadband Action Plan 2020](#)  
(released December 2020)



[Master Plan for Aging](#)  
(released January 2021)



[Future of Work: A New Social Compact for Work and Workers](#)  
(forthcoming from The Future of Work Commission)

A common throughline of this body of work is the role of colleges and universities in driving recovery and prosperity. Woven together, these reports can inspire a tapestry of reforms that will make California stronger across all economic sectors.

## About the Taskforce

The Recovery with Equity Taskforce was convened to envision a new approach for California's post-secondary preparation and workforce readiness. It was established in August 2020 by Governor Newsom's Senior Policy Advisor for Higher Education, Dr. Lande Ajose, in consultation with the Governor's Council for Post-Secondary Education. The Recovery with Equity Taskforce comprised California and national experts in higher education equity and innovation and was chaired by Dr. Ajose.

Learn more at:

**CAPostsecondaryForAll.org**  **@CAPostsecForAll**

## About the Author

Education First is a national, mission-driven strategy and policy organization with deep expertise in education improvement. Its mission is to deliver exceptional ideas, experience-based solutions and results so all students—and particularly low-income students and students of color—are prepared for success in college, career and life.



Learn more at [Education-First.com](https://Education-First.com).

## Support for this Report

The production of this report was funded by College Futures Foundation, which works to catalyze systemic change, increase college degree completion, and close equity gaps so that the dream of opportunity can become a reality available to every student—regardless of zip code, skin color, or income.



Learn more at [CollegeFutures.org](https://CollegeFutures.org).