



# Vision for Success

**STRENGTHENING** THE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES TO MEET CALIFORNIA'S NEEDS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With low tuition and a longstanding policy of full and open access, the CCCs are designed around a remarkable idea: that higher education should be available to everyone. The CCCs are equally remarkable for their versatility. They are the state's primary entry point into collegiate degree programs, the primary system for delivering career technical education and workforce training, a major provider of adult education, apprenticeship, and English as a Second Language courses, and a source of lifelong learning opportunities for California's diverse communities.

The CCCs have made significant strides in the last five years through sustained reform efforts in the areas of student success, transfer, and career technical education. The colleges are now well-poised to build on this success and accelerate the pace of improvement.

### At the same time, the CCCs face very serious challenges today:



Most students who enter a community college never complete a degree or certificate or transfer to a 4-year university. Researchers project that California's public higher education system is not producing nearly enough educated graduates to meet future workforce needs.



CCC students who do reach a defined educational goal such as a degree or transfer take a long time to do so, often accumulating many excess course credits along the way.



Older and working CCC students are often left behind in the system, lacking services and financial aid that suit their needs.



CCCs are more expensive than they appear—both to students and taxpayers—because of slow time-to-completion and a lack of financial aid to cover students' living expenses.



Serious and stubborn achievement gaps persist across the CCCs and high-need regions of the state are not served equitably.

## **LOOKING AHEAD: GOALS FOR MEETING CALIFORNIA'S NEEDS**

The success of California's broader system of higher education and workforce development stands or falls with the CCCs. To meet California's needs, the CCC system should strive to achieve the following goals by 2022:

- Increase by at least 20 percent the number of CCC students annually who acquire associates degrees, credentials, certificates, or specific skill sets that prepare them for an in-demand job.
- Increase by 35 percent the number of CCC students transferring annually to a UC or CSU.
- Decrease the average number of units accumulated by CCC students earning associate's degrees, from approximately 87 total units (the most recent system-wide average) to 79 total units—the average among the quintile of colleges showing the strongest performance on this measure.
- Increase the percent of exiting CTE students who report being employed in their field of study, from the most recent statewide average of 60 percent to an improved rate of 69 percent—the average among the quintile of colleges showing the strongest performance on this measure.
- Reduce equity gaps across all of the above measures through faster improvements among traditionally underrepresented student groups, with the goal of cutting achievement gaps by 40 percent within 5 years and fully closing those achievement gaps within 10 years.
- Reduce regional achievement gaps across all of the above measures through faster improvements among colleges located in regions with the lowest educational attainment of adults, with the ultimate goal of fully closing regional achievement gaps within 10 years.

In order to reach the ambitious system-wide goals proposed above, each college will need to do its part. Many colleges have already set goals as part of a system-wide or local effort and do not need to start from scratch—they should continue to use their goals as planned. However, every college should ensure their goals are aligned with the systemwide priorities and goals above, to ensure that the entire system is moving in a consistent direction.

## **A VISION FOR CHANGE**

Achieving these goals will require a combination of strategies and the coordinated efforts of tens-of-thousands of individuals both inside and outside the CCC system.

Below are **seven core commitments** the community college system can make to achieve these ambitious goals and realize its full potential to meet the future workforce needs of California:

### **1 | Focus relentlessly on students' end goals.**

Getting students to their individual educational goals—whether a degree, certificate, transfer, or specific skill set—should be the explicit focus of the CCCs. More than just offering courses, colleges need to be offering pathways to specific outcomes and providing supports for students to stay on those paths until completion.

### **2 | Always design and decide with the student in mind.**

Colleges need to make it easy for all students, including working adults, to access the courses and services they need. Students should not bear the burden of misaligned policies between education systems.

### **3 | Pair high expectations with high support.**

Students should be encouraged to go “all in” on their education, with support to meet their personal and academic challenges. Assessment and placement practices must be reformed so that students are placed at the highest appropriate course level, with ample supports to help them succeed.

### **4 | Foster the use of data, inquiry, and evidence.**

Data analysis should be a regular practice used for improving services at all levels, not a compliance activity. Decisions should be based on evidence, not anecdotes or hunches.

### **5 | Take ownership of goals and performance.**

The CCC system should be rigorously transparent about its performance, own its challenges, and adopt a solution-oriented mindset to those things it can control. Goals should be used to motivate and provide direction, not punish.

### **6 | Enable action and thoughtful innovation.**

Moving the needle on student outcomes will require calculated risk, careful monitoring, and acceptance that failures will sometimes happen. Innovation should be thoughtful and aligned with goals; results should be tracked early and often.

### **7 | Lead the work of partnering across systems.**

Education leaders across the education systems and workforce development systems need to meet much more frequently, in more depth, and with more personnel dedicated to the task. By working together these systems can strengthen pathways for students and improve results.

In each of these areas, there are clear steps for the CCC Chancellor's Office to lead and support the work of the colleges, from modeling the kinds of organizational changes and behaviors expected at the college level to advocating for CCC students at the highest levels of state government.

## **JOIN THE VISION FOR SUCCESS**

The [\*Vision for Success\*](#) document was developed through an extensive process of research, interviewing experts and key stakeholders, and inviting all Californians to participate in a Virtual Town Hall, which led to written submissions from approximately 550 individuals. Many who participated said they believe this moment offers an opportunity for transformational change in the CCCs.

Still, this opportunity will not be realized without collective action. All personnel in the college system can embrace the seven commitments and make changes big and small that help move the system closer to its goals. All stakeholders—indeed all Californians—should also lend their support to the effort, because the success of the CCCs is essential to the success of our state as a whole.





FOUNDATION *for* CALIFORNIA  
COMMUNITY COLLEGES



# VISION FOR SUCCESS

**STRENGTHENING** THE  
CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES  
TO MEET CALIFORNIA'S NEEDS



# Message from the Chancellor

It has been an honor and privilege to assume leadership of the California Community Colleges (CCCs). I appreciate the hard work of every faculty member, classified staff member, manager, and administrator in our system – your dedication to our more than 2.1 million students is inspiring. As Chancellor, my hope is to lay out a clear vision for our system, with clear goals that are centered on the current and future needs of Californians, and to lead our system toward greater success. This document, *Vision for Success*, is intended as a first step.

To create this document, our partners at the Foundation for California Community Colleges engaged a team of community college experts to review existing research and literature on the CCCs and gather input from a wide array of experts and stakeholders (SEE DETAILS ON PAGE 6). We also invited all interested Californians to participate in our Virtual Town Hall and more than 550 of you responded—including many CCC faculty, staff, and administrators who took the time to write in-depth comments. Our team read every comment and incorporated many of your thoughts and ideas into this document. Your input made it clear that our greatest asset is a committed, engaged workforce that is passionate about helping students succeed. I thank every person who participated in the development of this Strategic Vision. Your insights were invaluable.

Through these activities, the message we received is that California cares deeply about the future of its community colleges. The CCCs are seen as the state's engine of social and economic mobility. Our supporters want us to continue to afford opportunities to all who seek them, but also want us to step up the pace of improvement. They know that today's students are tomorrow's workforce, citizens, and leaders and they are worried that too few students are making it through college and achieving their dreams. I share these concerns and am ready to take bold action.

This document aims to give a clear-eyed, honest look at our performance as a system, both where we are excelling and where we are falling short. It sets out very clear goals for improvement. It also lays out a vision for success, framed as a series of seven commitments that we must make to California and to our students in order to improve—including concrete steps that I must take as Chancellor. I fully endorse the seven commitments and pledge to take the actions recommended in this document.

This Vision for Success is just the first step. In future months, I will work with the Board of Governors, my staff at the Chancellor's Office, college administrators, faculty, staff, students, trustees, and external stakeholders to translate this vision into action. I invite you to stay involved and continue to lend your voice and action toward our collective goals for improvement. We are counting on your help.

Sincerely,



Eloy Ortiz Oakley

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## CALIFORNIA'S COMMUNITY COLLEGES: **Engine of Social and Economic Mobility**

**“ We are training the people who will do our jobs when we retire. Our future depends on these students having the skills they need for our workforce. ”**

— **Cecilia Estolano**  
President, California Community Colleges  
Board of Governors

**“ As a statewide system, we need to be doing our part to educate and create responsible citizens. ”**

— **Dolores Davison**  
Professor, Foothill College  
and Academic Senate Leader

California is known throughout the world for its spirit of innovation and ground-breaking ideas. So it is no wonder that the Golden State is home to the California Community Colleges (CCC), the most open and accessible system of higher education in the world. With low tuition and a longstanding policy of full and open access, the CCCs are designed around a remarkable idea: that higher education should be available to everyone. For centuries around the world, higher education was reserved for social elites. College was a means of reinforcing the social hierarchy and people's roles in it. California's Master Plan for Higher Education, in contrast, did something entirely different: make college fully accessible through the CCCs and provide advanced degrees through two public systems, the California State University (CSU) and the University of California (UC).

### **UNIQUELY IMPORTANT TO CALIFORNIA'S FUTURE**

Other states have community colleges, but California's are unique in several ways. Compared to other states, California's public higher education system relies more heavily on community colleges. Sixty percent of California undergraduates attend community colleges—14 percent more than the national average.<sup>1</sup> Compared to other states, California ranks 5th in the proportion of recent high school graduates who enroll in community colleges, and 47th in the proportion who enroll in 4-year universities.<sup>2</sup> Our system of public higher education was explicitly designed for most degree-seeking students to get their start at a CCC, making the transfer process between CCCs and public universities critically important to the overall output of the broader California system. The CCCs are also important beyond California's borders. One in five American community college students

attends a CCC, making the system a vital source of training and education for the nation's future workforce.<sup>3</sup>

The CCCs are equally remarkable for their versatility. In addition to being the primary entry point into **collegiate degree programs**, the colleges are also the primary system for delivering **career technical education and workforce training** to Californians, preparing individuals for skilled jobs in an ever-changing labor market. The CCCs are also a major provider of **adult education, apprenticeship, and English as a Second Language**, offering thousands of valuable work and life skills courses to adults seeking to improve their lives or reenter the education system. Finally, the colleges are a source of **lifelong learning**, offering recreation, enrichment, and exercise to California's diverse communities. These opportunities for learning, training, and civic engagement together make the CCCs a rich source of opportunity for all Californians.

Collegiate degrees, career technical education, adult education—each of these is a massive enterprise on its own. Together, they make the CCCs indispensable to California's workforce, economy, and overall welfare.

### **MORE IMPORTANT NOW THAN EVER**

If you are reading this document, chances are good you already hold a college degree. If you are middle aged or older, it is also likely you earn more than your parents did. For those fortunate enough to be in these circumstances, it can be easy to forget that many people today are not. Income inequality in America is growing, and compared to previous generations, fewer people are able to achieve greater economic success

than their parents.<sup>4</sup> The modern-day mission of the CCCs was established in 1960 by California's Master Plan for Higher Education, when upward mobility was more accessible to more people. Now, major worldwide forces like automation and globalism have permanently changed our economy and workforce, eliminating many unionized jobs that guaranteed middle-class wages but didn't require any college. Today's students face a very different job market compared to their counterparts in 1960. Now more than ever, students need quality higher education to penetrate those sectors of the job market that offer secure employment and wages sufficient to support a family.

Because they are situated at the nexus of workforce training and higher education, the CCCs are essential to preparing California's young people for this future and for helping middle-aged and older Californians navigate the changing environment of the present-day workforce. Given its size, scope, and multiple missions, the CCC system is essential to California's success as a state. With the sixth largest economy in the world, California needs well-educated workers to propel our economy forward. Just as important, California needs engaged, well-informed citizens to participate in our thriving democracy and tackle the complex issues of our state. Because of their size and reach, and the educational programs they provide, the CCCs play a critical role in preparing our citizens for these important roles.

“**The community colleges are the premier workforce training provider in the state. For quality training that is accessible and affordable, the CCCs can't be matched.**”

— **Tim Rainey**  
Executive Director,  
California Workforce  
Development Board

“**Above all else, we must see the [community colleges] as the hub of California's growth. The vision of the future needs to recognize how central the [community colleges] are to the state's overall development as well as the individual's personal growth toward success.**”

— **Instructor from Clovis Community College**  
via the Virtual Town Hall

## Developing the Vision

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To develop this document, the Foundation for California Community Colleges engaged two experienced community college policy experts as project leaders and charged them with crafting a strategic vision that incorporated extensive input from a wide variety of sources.

These sources included:

- Relevant research reports, policy analyses, and conceptual frameworks on community college reform and success, both from California and national sources;
- Approximately 50 interviews with stakeholders and experts inside and outside the CCC system, including:
  - » College CEOs;
  - » College faculty leaders, including members of the statewide Academic Senate for the CCCs;
  - » Students;
  - » Representatives of business and industry;
  - » Representatives of the state workforce development system;
  - » Representatives of social justice and advocacy groups;
  - » State Legislators and policy and finance staff at the state level;
  - » Higher education researchers; and
  - » The CCC Chancellor, Vice Chancellors, and the CCC Board of Governors President;
- Previous surveys conducted by the Chancellor's Office.
- A Virtual Town Hall, which offered all interested parties an opportunity to provide input online during the months of April and May 2017. To promote the Virtual Town Hall, the Foundation for California Community Colleges launched a social media campaign resulting in over 800,000 impressions on Facebook and other networks, over 58,000 views of the video soliciting Town Hall feedback, 12,000 unique clicks linking to the video and Town Hall submission page, and approximately 550 individuals submitting electronic comments to the Virtual Town Hall. Each of these submissions was read and coded by the research team. The key themes from these comments were included throughout this document, along with quotes from respondents' written submissions.

Prior to publication, the document was reviewed by seven project advisors (LISTED ON PAGE 2) who provided valuable feedback and advice, as well as the Chancellor and Chancellor's Office executive team and staff at the Foundation for California Community Colleges.

## HOW THIS DOCUMENT IS ORGANIZED

This document presents a vision for the future of the California Community Colleges. The first section begins with an accounting of current system performance, reviewing major achievements while also taking a hard look at the greatest challenges. The next section introduces specific goals for future improvement, focusing on the handful of outcomes that could drive needed change throughout the system. This section also discusses a number of important milestones that colleges can set and monitor at the local level.

The following section is a comprehensive vision for change, framed as a set of seven commitments that taken together can move the college system in the right direction to collectively reach our goals. The final section issues a call to action, asking the entire community of CCC stakeholders to join in this Vision for Success.



## Major Achievements, Major Challenges

This section strives to present a clear-eyed accounting of the current performance of the CCC system, first reviewing the system's strengths and major achievements, then continuing with a hard look at its greatest challenges.

### STRENGTHS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The **size and scope** of the CCC system is nothing short of incredible. There are 114 CCCs across California, which last year served approximately 2.1 million students.<sup>5</sup> As points of comparison, the California State University (CSU) system served 465,686 students in 2015-16 and the University of California system (UC) served 251,714 students that year.<sup>6</sup> In the next most populous state, Texas, the public community college system served a little over 700,000 students during the same time period. By any comparative measure, the CCC system is massive.<sup>7</sup>

The CCCs also have one of most **diverse** student bodies of any higher

education system, roughly matching the demographics of the state. According to the CCC Chancellor's Office, in 2015-16:

- 42.5 percent of students identified as Hispanic;
- 27.4 percent as White;
- 6.4 percent as African American;
- 11.6 percent as Asian;
- 3.2 percent as Filipino or Pacific Islander; and
- 3.7 percent as multi-ethnic.<sup>8</sup>

CCC students are diverse in many other ways too. They vary in age: about one-quarter of students are fresh out of high school and close to one-third are between the ages of 20 and 24 years old. Another one-quarter are between the ages of 25 to 39, and about 16 percent are over age 40.<sup>9</sup> Roughly 25 percent of CCC students are first-time students to their college while about 11 percent are returning after one or more terms of being absent.<sup>10</sup>

“The most promising aspect of our California Community Colleges is the diversity—of thought, culture, experience, immigration story, sexual orientation, economic status, physical ability, and overall world view that our students bring with them to our institutions. The California Community College is a context that provides so many different types of opportunities: from a second chance for under-educated students to the opportunity for training in a second career. The California Community College is really a place of great opportunities for anyone who attends, regardless of the student's educational starting point.”

— **Teresa Meléndrez**  
Student Services Professional,  
City College of San Francisco,  
via the Virtual Town Hall

“ On the healthcare side, Community Colleges are instrumental in training our allied health professionals and for providing the career pipeline of professionals we represent. We really value the Community Colleges more than some of the private and for-profit institutions that are involved in this work. Community Colleges are a more trustworthy institution of higher learning because the profit motivation isn't there. ”

— Michelle Cabrera  
Healthcare and Research Director,  
SEIU State Council

In 2016, 42 percent of CCC students were the first in their family to attend college.<sup>11</sup>

CCC students also vary greatly in terms of their individual goals and reasons for stepping onto a CCC campus in the first place. Some are seeking just a few classes to build new specific skills and knowledge to qualify for a promotion, while others are starting over and looking to enter an entirely new profession. Some CCC students are returning from military service and starting their next chapter as civilians in the workforce. Some are newcomers to our country, seeking to learn English and civic competency. Still others are community members seeking everything from parenting classes, recreation and exercise, visual and performing arts, and enrichment. Not surprisingly, this broadly diverse student body arrives at the campus with varying levels of academic preparation for college. Some freshmen are just as prepared as their counterparts starting at a University of California (UC). Other CCC students are reading at an elementary-school level. While UC and CSU accept only the top performing students in the state, the CCCs accept all students, often proudly referring to their student body as the “top 100 percent.”

Like their students, community colleges themselves are highly diverse. Colleges range dramatically in size and location, from urban colleges like Santa Ana College in Orange County with 62,000 students to small rural colleges like Feather River College in Quincy or Lassen College in Susanville, which serve fewer than 3,350 and 4,400 students respectively.<sup>12</sup> Each college in the system faces unique challenges. Small colleges sometimes struggle to implement new initiatives

due to the size of their faculty, staff, and administrative teams. Colleges in large cities are often grappling with complicated community politics and tensions in addition to the normal work of teaching and learning. Churn in leadership and baby boomer retirements are a challenge in many community colleges and districts, with hiring in some areas further complicated by shallower pools of qualified applicants.

As a system, the CCCs historically have been successful at making higher education **accessible and affordable**. CCC tuition has always been among the lowest in the nation. At an annual rate of \$1,380 for a full-time course load,<sup>13</sup> California fees are currently the lowest in the nation, with New Mexico coming in second at \$1,664.<sup>14</sup> Even then, only about 52 percent of students pay fees;<sup>15</sup> the remainder qualify for means-tested Board of Governors fee waivers. This has made CCCs the most popular choice for low-income Californians: those making less than \$30,000 a year are more likely to start at CCCs than other institutions.<sup>16</sup> The low tuition has also helped California's more advantaged populations, by making college degrees and quality technical training affordable and widely available across the state.

Because of the affordability of the CCC system, **California sends more young people to college** than other states. At last count in 2013, 46 percent of 18– to 24–year old Californians were enrolled in post-secondary education, more than the national average of 43 percent.<sup>17</sup>

The CCCs have also provided a **strong academic foundation** for students who go on to earn 4-year degrees at a California public university. Over half of CSU graduates and close to a third of

UC graduates started at a CCC.<sup>18</sup> CCC students who transfer to a CSU or UC persist and graduate at rates similar to those students who start at our public universities as freshmen.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to these core strengths, the CCCs have made significant strides in the last five years through **sustained reform efforts** in the areas of student success, transfer, and career technical education. With the Student Success Task Force report in 2012, the CCCs embarked on a concerted, system-wide shift toward prioritizing student outcomes. In 2010, the CCCs began a partnership with CSU to establish Associate Degrees for Transfer, which grant CCC students guaranteed admission to specific majors in the CSU system, with junior status, if they complete required coursework in defined majors and areas of emphasis. Also in 2012, the CCCs launched the *Doing What Matters for Jobs and the Economy Framework* to focus on core strategies for closing the job skills gap in California. This work was followed by the Strong Workforce initiative, which provided recommendations and strategies for an annual state investment of \$200 million to bolster career technical education and aligned various funds, metrics, and data in support of the effort.

These foundational activities have provided direction to the system and resulted in a long list of positive changes. In 2017, the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office listed these improvements and accomplishments in a report to the state Legislature:

- Policies to increase the number of students receiving orientation, assessment, and education plans;

- Clearer statewide transfer pathways in more than 40 majors;
- More counselors and other student success personnel;
- More student support services and student equity efforts;
- Adoption of evidence based models of basic skills assessment and instruction;
- New technology systems that help students explore careers and develop education plans; access counseling, tutoring, and student services; and track their progress toward completion; and
- Streamlined CTE pathways, support services, and contextualized basic skills instruction under the new workforce program created in 2016.<sup>20</sup>

These efforts have led to slow but steady upticks on indicators like course completion, persistence, and transition from remedial education to collegiate-level coursework.<sup>21</sup> While to date these increases in student outcomes have been incremental, the colleges are now well-poised to build on this success and accelerate the pace of improvement.

## **SYSTEM-WIDE CHALLENGES**

Despite the notable achievements described above, the CCCs face very serious challenges today. Despite its great size and scope, the system's overall performance lags far behind what California needs for an educated workforce and future citizenry. The world is changing dramatically around us, demanding that colleges change too. There is no doubt that educators across the CCC system are working tirelessly to teach their students and help them get ahead.

But looking across our system as a whole, there are striking signs of trouble:



#### MOST COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS NEVER REACH A DEFINED END GOAL

At last count, only 48 percent of students who entered a CCC left with a degree, certificate, or transferred *after six years*.<sup>22</sup> (Even this rate is overstated: CCC students earning less than 6 units or students who did not attempt a math or English course within three years are not counted in this calculation.)<sup>23</sup> This anemic completion rate is a troubling sign for the overall health of California's higher education and workforce development system.

Several research organizations have attempted to quantify California's "degree and certificate gap"—meaning the projected shortfall between the number of educated workers needed and the number that California's institutions are expected to produce. Estimates of the gap vary due to different starting assumptions, but there is widespread agreement that California's public education system is substantially behind the curve in meeting future demand for educated workers. The Public Policy Institute of California anticipates a gap of 1.1 million bachelor's degrees by 2030.<sup>24</sup> If California wants to maintain a competitive edge nationally, the gap is even more stark. To be among the top ten states in educational attainment, California would need to close a gap of 2.4 million technical certificates, associates degrees, and bachelor's degrees combined by 2025.<sup>25</sup> Using more conservative measures of baseline degree production, the Lumina Foundation estimates California would need 3.7

million more associates and bachelor's degrees by 2025 to be internationally competitive.<sup>26</sup>

Across these various estimates, experts agree that too few individuals are receiving post-secondary education and training at CCCs and too few are transferring to a CSU or UC. Certainly, the state's K-12 and 4-year university systems are equally responsible for doing their part to close the degree gap, but without improvement in the all-important CCC system, California simply will not have enough educated and trained workers to sustain its future economy.



#### STUDENTS WHO DO REACH GOALS TAKE A LONG TIME TO DO SO

Students who complete an associate's degree on average take 5.2 years to do so (the median time is 3.8 years). The average length of time for CCC students to transfer to a university or complete a certificate is not currently known. Because students come to the CCCs with a variety of educational goals and life circumstances, there is no specific timeframe for completion that is appropriate for every student. Still, the system-wide average is considerably longer than the two-year timeframe for degrees and transfer preparation that was expected by the architects of the system and is still envisioned by many students and their parents today. When students stay in community college for many years, they delay their entry into the workforce and miss out on income, both in the short term and over the course of their lifetimes.

Just as problematic, students often accumulate far more course units than they need to reach their identified end

goal of a degree, certificate, or transfer. While some amount of academic exploration is part of the education process, excessive accumulation of units is frequently a sign of trouble: it can mean that students could not enroll in the classes they needed for their degree or transfer, or that they lacked sufficient guidance to enroll in the right courses or find a clear academic direction in the first place. Excess units create inefficiencies and drive up costs for both the student and California taxpayers, the latter of which heavily subsidize all CCC enrollment. The more students take courses that do not move them closer to their desired degree, certificate, or transfer, the more they crowd out and slow down other students who need those same courses for reaching their own educational goals.



#### OLDER AND WORKING STUDENTS ARE OFTEN LEFT BEHIND

Although open to all Californians, the CCCs were initially designed primarily to serve young people just out of high school. Adults of other ages present unique challenges and today represent a significant portion of the community college student body: over 40 percent are age 25 or older. Working adults can typically attend college only part-time. Many are bread-winners juggling the demands of work, childcare, and household, with limited time to get to school, attend class, and study at home—much less see a counselor or find a tutor. Some are transitioning back to civilian life after serving in the military (nearly 42 percent of California veterans receiving GI benefits attend a CCC).<sup>28</sup> Others, nearly 8 percent of CCC students, are immigrants here as legal permanent residents.<sup>29</sup>

Adult learners are a highly diverse group facing a wide range of challenges, from relatively common difficulties like finding child care or transportation, to much more daunting issues such as food and housing insecurity, mental health issues, and serious learning disabilities. This range of challenges requires an array of policy and programmatic responses. As a start in the right direction, many colleges have expanded access to working adults by offering courses throughout the day, week, and year, as well as offering student services and courses online. Moving forward, CCCs need systematic ways to identify the needs of adult learners and connect them with the right services on and off campus.

Improved services for working adults are not just important for the population currently enrolled in CCCs. Across California, an estimated 15 percent of working age adults, about 4.5 million people, have participated in higher education at some point but stopped out before completing a program of study.<sup>30</sup> In order for California to close its degree and certificate gap, this group must be recruited back into college. Likewise, adults who never entered college need multiple avenues back into education, as well as support to address the challenges that led them to leave and avoid returning to school in the first place.

One important group of adults in the CCCs are “skills builders”—adults who improve their earnings by attending community colleges for one or more courses, but don’t necessarily intend to earn degree or certificate. Recently, the CCC Chancellor’s Office has recognized skills builders as a unique group and has worked to track successful outcomes among them.

“We won’t close our degree attainment gap with 18-year-olds alone, and one population we haven’t paid enough attention to is adults who have partially completed a degree or certificate. We don’t offer financial aid for people over 28—that’s an arbitrary cut off, and we need to help older adults to complete degrees and certificates. That’s how you address inter-generational poverty. Educated parents will support their children’s educational aspirations.”

— Lande Ajose  
Chair, California Student Aid Commission

“There should be no reason why enrollment in districts is either static or declining when poverty rates are increasing. Our relevance will be severely compromised unless we step back and ask why segments of the adult population are not being served.”

— Jonathan Lightman  
Executive Director, Faculty Association of California Community Colleges, via the Virtual Town Hall

“ Look at the number of students in the community college system from underrepresented groups, especially Black and Latino students. The K-12 system already fails these students; the CCCs must provide **student-centered resources to ensure opportunities and successful outcomes** for these students. We can’t afford to fail – doing so is unacceptable. ”

– **Jeannette Zanipatin**  
Legislative Staff Attorney, MALDEF

“ The idea the legislature has of a community college student is focused on traditional students who have just graduated from high school and are living with their parents. But our community college students are burdened with **massive non-tuition costs** like transportation, housing, and textbooks. Community colleges educate 65 percent of California’s college students but only receive seven percent of Cal Grant dollars. Our students need more resources to be successful. ”

– **Eman Dalili**  
Student Member, California Community Colleges Board of Governors

Understanding the diverse educational goals and outcomes among adult learners is the first critical step in providing tailored coursework and services to meet their needs.



#### COMMUNITY COLLEGES ARE MORE EXPENSIVE THAN THEY APPEAR

California’s community colleges offer one of the least expensive tuition rates in the country. Still, the total amount of money spent by students and taxpayers to attain a particular outcome at a community college can be quite high because the average student takes several years to complete a credential, degree, or transfer and commonly accumulate many excess units along the way.

Another significant problem for students is the high cost of living in California and the limits of financial aid for CCC students. While about half of CCC students have their tuition waived, few qualify for financial aid to cover their living expenses such as transportation and textbooks. Approximately 46 percent of CCC students receive need-based financial aid, compared to about two-thirds of resident undergraduate students at UC and CSU.<sup>31</sup> One reason for this is that many state and federal student aid programs are structured to help full-time students and many community college students attend part time. In addition, California’s CalGrant Program is less generous to CCC students, irrespective of full – or part-time status. Examining college costs around the state, The Institute for College Access and Success (TICAS) found that after factoring in financial aid, the net cost of community college was actually more expensive for students than UC or CSU in seven of the nine regions studied.

Nowhere was the CCC found to be the least expensive option.<sup>32</sup>

This problem creates a trap: students need to work and can’t enroll full time, but part-time enrollment drags out their education, disqualifies them for certain financial aid benefits, and can contribute to a lack of focus and motivation. Working adults who support their households face even greater challenges. These students need appropriate financial aid supports as well as other fixes described elsewhere in this report.



#### SERIOUS AND STUBBORN ACHIEVEMENT GAPS PERSIST

In the community college system, certain student groups are much less likely to reach a defined end goal such as a degree, certificate, or transfer. Specifically, completion rates are lower among African-American students (36 percent), American Indian/Alaskan students (38 percent), Hispanic students (41 percent), and Pacific Islander students (43 percent), compared to stronger completion rates of Asian students (65 percent), Filipino students (57 percent) and White students (54 percent). In general, these gaps are lessened among students who come to college more academically prepared and do not need remediation. Unfortunately, remediation is also the area where some of the most troubling achievement gaps are found. For example, among African-American students, only 20 percent passed a collegiate-level math course after taking remedial math compared to 39 percent of White students and 48 percent of Asian students.<sup>33</sup>

These statistics are problematic today and will only grow in importance as California's population continues to evolve. The proportion of working-age people from non-White groups is projected to grow to 70 percent in 2060. The increase in racial and ethnic diversity will be even more evident in the younger age cohorts that will populate the CCCs.<sup>34</sup>



#### HIGH-NEED REGIONS OF THE STATE ARE NOT SERVED EQUITABLY

Researchers have found significant disparities in basic CCC service coverage and penetration in different regions of the state. Areas with the lowest college attainment of adults and the lowest median household income also have the lowest CCC enrollment per capita.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the CCC's valuable education and job-training services are not always reaching those parts of the state where they are most needed. This is particularly an issue in the Central Valley and the Sierras, the Inland Empire, and the Far North regions of the state.<sup>36</sup> While regional disparities in college-going rates also exist for the UC and CSU systems, the pattern is especially troubling in the CCCs because they are specifically intended to be a local, fully accessible source of postsecondary education for all Californians.

Individually and together, these indicators are very troubling. Despite some modest gains in student outcomes, the CCC system is not performing at the level needed to reliably provide students with opportunities for mobility and to meet California's future workforce needs. As described above, the success of California is intertwined with the success of the CCCs. For the fiscal health of our state and the well-being of our society and democracy, we must collectively embrace aggressive goals for strengthening the CCCs. It is imperative to increase degree and certificate attainment, workforce outcomes, and transfers. It is also essential to reduce the unnecessary amount of time and units students accumulate on their way to attaining a degree, certificate, transfer, or workforce outcome, so that more resources are freed up to serve more students. Finally, it is critical to make headway and among underserved groups of students and those living in underserved areas of the state—this is a moral imperative that matches our California ideals of social justice and equality. The next section outlines specific goals that address these needs.

“ There is no actual college in our rural area, only online. Students need to have a car to get to [the nearest college which is] 50 miles away in order to take lab [classes] or engage in actual classroom conversation. ”

— **Member of the public**  
via the Virtual Town Hall

“ The biggest challenge facing the CCC system today is **improving the outcomes and completion rate of students**, particularly those of students from communities historically underrepresented and underserved in post-secondary education. We must take responsibility for and address the inequitable outcomes for students of color across all our colleges. ”

— **Linda Collins**  
Executive Director, Career Ladders Project, via the Virtual Town Hall



## LOOKING AHEAD: **Goals for Meeting California's Needs**

The success of California's broader system of higher education and workforce development stands or falls with the California Community Colleges (CCCs). While many other players are involved—K-12 schools, public and private colleges and universities, county offices of education, and workforce investment boards—the CCCs are the linchpin to meeting California's civic and economic needs. For this reason it is vitally important that the CCC system regularly assess how its performance stacks up against those needs.

Goals have other important purposes. They help establish a shared vision, which is particularly important at this moment when substantial state dollars are coming into the system, new initiatives are being launched, and a new Chancellor is at the helm. They serve as a goalpost, pointing all parties in the same direction and establishing a shared destination to reach.

Of course, setting goals is also a very challenging task for any system of education. For the CCCs, the task is more complicated given its multiple missions and vast array of offerings (SEE SIDEBAR ON PAGE 15). Moreover, many of the results CCCs desire for their students are not entirely in the control of the colleges themselves. For instance, student outcomes in college are in part dependent on student's preparation at the K-12 level. Successful transfers require available slots in universities. Employment and wage gains after graduation are subject to labor market conditions. The performance of all levels of public education is influenced by the availability of funding, which is too often volatile and scarce.

In previous years, this shared responsibility and lack of full control has made all of California's education systems hesitant to hold themselves accountable for results. While this stance is understandable, it is not productive, especially in a state like

California that has no central oversight of higher education. To improve on measures that require shared effort, the systems themselves need to step up and agree to cooperate. As the linchpin of the broader system of higher education, the CCCs are well suited to take the first step and accept responsibility for improving functions that cut across systems. Ideally, California's other education systems will partner with the CCC system and adopt aligned goals for improvement.

“ We're measuring too many things—this is one of the challenges we have—all of the different metrics that we're required to use. IEPI has metrics that we were required to set; ACCJC has its own metrics that we're reporting on annually; we have goals in our equity plans and student success plans. Can't we just focus on three or four big goals and align our programs to these? ”

— Mojdeh Mehdizadeh  
President, Contra Costa College

## SYSTEM-WIDE GOALS

For 2.1 million CCC students—and the health of the broader system of higher education and workforce development—the CCC system must embrace a handful of clear, aggressive goals that reflect the most urgent needs of the moment. Based on a review of current literature and research and interviews with approximately 50 experts inside and outside the system, these urgent needs are defined as increasing the number and percentage of students who reach a defined educational goal and decreasing

the amount of time and cost it takes them to do it, while addressing critical achievement gaps across students and regions.

To meet California's economic and social needs, the CCC system should aim to reach the following *system-wide* goals by 2022—five years from the publication of this document:

- 1 | Increase by at least 20 percent the number of CCC students annually who acquire associates degrees, credentials, certificates, or specific skill sets that prepare them for an in-demand job.** This increase is needed to meet future workforce demand in California, as analyzed by the Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. This goal is consistent with the recommendations of the California Strategic Workforce Development Plan. Equally important to the number of students served will be the type of education they receive: programs, awards, and course sequences need to match the needs of regional economies and employers.<sup>37</sup>
- 2 | Increase by 35 percent the number of CCC students system-wide transferring annually to a UC or CSU.** This is the increase needed to meet California's future workforce demand for bachelor's degrees, as projected by the Public Policy Institute of California. (In California, occupations requiring bachelor's degrees are growing even faster than jobs requiring associate's degrees or less college.) Meeting this aggressive goal will require the full engagement and partnership of CSU and UC. While ambitious, the pace of improvement envisioned in this goal is not unprecedented: between 2012-13 and 2015-16 (a three-year period), CCC to CSU transfers increased by 32 percent and between Fall 1999 and Fall 2005 (a six-year period), CCC to UC transfers increased by 40 percent.<sup>38</sup>

## Measuring the success of multiple missions

The system-wide goals on this page focus on recognized completions like degrees, industry-recognized certificates, and transfers to university. Of course, some portion of community college students are “skills builders”—students aiming to gain job skills through just a few courses—or students who are aspiring to other goals such as learning English or developing parenting skills. The impact of this kind of education is harder—but not impossible—to measure.

As the CCCs move ahead with more widespread education planning for all students, the aim is to be accountable for helping each student meet his or her individual goals. This may require new methods and tools for gathering information, whether annual surveys of CCC graduates that capture the full impact of the CCC experience on students' lives or more sophisticated techniques that can follow students into the workforce or ultimately even measure the intergenerational effects of higher education. A better understanding of how different community college offerings impact students' lives will help the CCC system hone its priorities and ensure that it is adding real value as an engine of economic mobility.

## Rethinking how we measure performance at the system level

At the system level, outcomes are commonly reported for cohorts of students followed over six years.<sup>42</sup> This lengthy timeframe takes into account the large percentage of students who attend a CCC part-time and appropriately gives colleges credit for successful completions among students who need significant time to reach their goals. However, many observers interviewed for this report believe that six years is too long to wait before reporting on outcomes for cohorts of students. They argue that more information is needed sooner to get an up-to-date, complete look at how well the system is performing and to provide information that can stimulate action. In addition, many students and families expect to spend less than six years earning a degree or transfer eligibility and the 6-year metric obscures the likelihood of doing so.

To address these shortcomings, the CCC system should supplement its 6-year cohort reports with 2-, 3-, 4- and 5-year cohort reports, to provide more transparency and more complete information about how students are progressing. This kind of reporting will help students and families know what to expect and will illuminate areas where more improvement and support is needed.

- 3 | **Decrease the average number of units accumulated by CCC students earning associate's degrees, from approximately 87 total units (the most recent system-wide average) to 79 total units—the average among the quintile of colleges showing the strongest performance on this measure.** (Associate's degrees typically require 60 units.) Reducing the average number of units-to-degree will help more students reach their educational goals sooner, and at less cost to them. It will also free up taxpayer dollars that can be put toward serving more students.<sup>39</sup>
- 4 | **Increase the percent of exiting CTE students who report being employed in their field of study, from the most recent statewide average of 60 percent to an improved rate of 69 percent—the average among the quintile of colleges showing the strongest performance on this measure in the most recent administration of the CTE Outcomes Survey.** Improvements on this measure would indicate that colleges are providing career education programs that prepare students for available jobs and offering supports that help students find jobs.<sup>40</sup>
- 5 | **Reduce equity gaps** across all of the above measures through faster improvements among traditionally underrepresented student groups, with the goal of cutting achievement gaps by 40 percent within 5 years and fully closing those achievement gaps for good within 10 years.
- 6 | **Reduce regional achievement gaps** across all of the above measures through faster improvements among colleges located in regions with the lowest educational attainment of adults, with the ultimate goal of closing regional achievement gaps for good within 10 years.

### COLLEGE-LEVEL GOALS

In order to reach the ambitious system-wide goals proposed above, each college will need to do its part. Of course, many colleges have already

set goals as part of a system-wide or local effort. Colleges with established performance goals do not need to start from scratch—they should continue to use their goals as planned. However, every college should make sure they have goals that address the system-wide priorities captured in the goals above, to ensure that the entire system is moving in a consistent direction. This means that all colleges should have goals for **increasing degrees and certificate completion, increasing transfers, improving time to completion, increasing job placement in field of study, and narrowing achievement gaps** across all these measures. If colleges have already developed these goals as part of another initiative, they should review them to ensure they are ambitious enough and aligned with the five-year system-wide goals articulated above. This should be done through the local participatory governance process and with input from the Chancellor's Office, to ensure that the local context as well as broader regional and state needs are taken into account.

“ **The achievement gap between lower income, ethnically diverse students and higher income, mostly White and Asian American students is clear and pronounced at most community colleges. As the system most devoted to open access, we must address this gap fully and effectively.** ”

— **Community College Dean**  
via the Virtual Town Hall

Different goals are appropriate at different levels. The system-wide goals above are intended to focus only on the highest-order outcomes. Colleges

will also want to take a close look at finer-grain measures and indicators that show progress toward desired outcomes. For instance, colleges should regularly be looking for improvements in **student persistence, completion of 30 units, progress toward transfer-level coursework in the first or second year**, as indicators of progress toward degrees and transfers. Colleges should also monitor and aim to grow **full-time enrollment (15 units per semester)** and **continuous enrollment**. Of course, not all students can attend full-time and continuously, such as working adults who need to learn and earn at the same time. Still, colleges can and should encourage more students to attend full time than currently do, especially those who are young and not financially supporting others.

Colleges should also monitor and set goals related to the employment and earnings of graduates such as **wage gains** or **percent of graduates attaining a living wage**. These measures are commonly used to monitor outcomes specifically among graduates of career technical education programs, but it is also appropriate to monitor them for all students, so that colleges have a clear picture of students' lives after they leave a CCC.

## USING GOALS TO DRIVE CHANGE

Just as important as setting goals is the way they are used. Presently, the CCC Board of Governors (BOG) is required by state law to identify performance measures and develop annual performance targets that are “challenging and quantifiable.”<sup>41</sup> While the CCC system has identified these performance measures, in the past the Chancellor’s Office and Board of Governors have not used them

consistently to drive change. Moving forward, the BOG should embrace the more aggressive goals outlined in this document and use them to update its strategies for improvement. Progress toward the goals should be reviewed at least annually, on a predictable schedule.

Additionally, the BOG should call on all college districts to do the same: focus on a set of clear, consistent goals and return to them at least annually to mark progress and correct course as needed. As discussed in greater detail below, this is an essential strategy for maintaining focus among all of the competing activities and initiatives that are part of normal operations.

“ If we don’t set accountability standards in terms of seeing an increase, or setting a minimum threshold, then there’s no way to know whether progress is being made. ”

— **Hasun Khan**  
Student Member, California Community  
Colleges Board of Governors



“ The needs are great, the resources are adequate, and the momentum is building. It is time for leadership to assert itself. It will take a new generation of passionate, talented, dedicated and empowered community college leaders to transform the old model to meet both the needs of today and tomorrow. ”

— **Dr. William Scroggins**  
President and CEO,  
Mt. San Antonio College,  
via the Virtual Town Hall

# A Vision for Change

The goals set forth in this document are very ambitious and there is no easy path to reach them. Achieving these goals will require a combination of strategies and the coordinated efforts of tens-of-thousands of individuals both inside and outside the California Community Colleges (CCCs). Not only will California need the talent and perseverance of college presidents, administrators, faculty, staff, trustees, and students, it will also need the support and engagement of the Governor, Legislature, University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) systems, workforce development system, K-12 education system, business and labor organizations, philanthropists, and community and civic groups. It will take a sustained effort by the CCC Chancellor, the Board of Governors, and the entire staff at the system level to lead the charge, support the hard work of the colleges, and help maintain focus and morale. There is no denying this is a tall order, but California and its students deserve no less.

Below are **seven core commitments** the CCC system as a whole can make to achieve these ambitious goals and realize its full potential to meet the future workforce needs of California:

- 1 | **Focus relentlessly on students' end goals.**
- 2 | **Always design and decide with the student in mind.**
- 3 | **Pair high expectations with high support.**
- 4 | **Foster the use of data, inquiry, and evidence.**
- 5 | **Take ownership of goals and performance.**
- 6 | **Enable action and thoughtful innovation.**
- 7 | **Lead the work of partnering across systems.**

Together these seven commitments reflect a fresh mindset that will be needed to carry the CCCs forward as a unified system. The pages that follow elaborate on these commitments: the problems they are intended to address, what must be done to fulfill the commitments, and how specifically the Chancellor and the Chancellor's Office can lead the way.

“ The colleges need to **put student success at the forefront of all decisions** made at all levels of the college, not just pay lip-service to the success agenda. Student success needs to permeate every committee, task force, and class of employees...Change needs to be radical and transformational. Every college policy, rule, procedure and practice needs to be scrutinized and reformed immediately if it provided a barrier to student success and completion. The teaching-learning environment has to be rebuilt to focus on research driven strategies that prove successful with students...Student success should become **EVERYTHING** at all 113 colleges. ”

— **Bill Piland**  
Professor Emeritus,  
San Diego State University,  
via the Virtual Town Hall



## COMMITMENTS

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## COMMITMENT 1: **Focus relentlessly on students' end goals.**

As a state, we have long prioritized open access to college as a core value—it's one of the greatest strengths of the CCCs. But that priority, combined with multiple statutory missions and a problematic funding mechanism that drives rapid expansion in boom times and abrupt contractions during recessions, has led to sprawling catalogs of courses for students that do not necessarily match either California's or students' needs. For those new to the college environment, the number of choices can be more overwhelming than exciting. When students cannot see a clear path from start to finish, the task of completing college is daunting.

The challenges of today require that we focus much more intentionally on getting every student to his or her defined end goal, whether a credential, degree, certificate, transfer, or specific skill set. This focus on students' end goals should be the "North Star" of all reform efforts at every level of the system. This will require both a shift in

mindset and a shift in the way colleges and the system do business. More than just offering courses, colleges need to be offering pathways to specific outcomes—whether transfer or success in the workplace—and providing sufficient supports for students to stay on those paths until completion.

### **FULFILLING THE COMMITMENT**

In navigating toward the North Star, the system needs a simple but comprehensive framework that can be easily communicated and evaluated across colleges. At the state level, the Chancellor's Office plans to use the Guided Pathways initiative as an organizing framework to align and guide all initiatives aimed at improving student success. This \$150 million one-time state investment over five years will give colleges the means and motivation to spur large-scale change across the system and bring together other existing categorical funds and apportionment dollars in a coordinated fashion.

“ In and of itself, community college is not a destination. What matters is where students are going in life and how we are helping them get there. ”

— State-level  
higher education official

The Guided Pathways model engages college administration, faculty, and staff to enact comprehensive changes across an entire college. In general, the model used across the country is organized around four key concepts, listed below. In California, Guided Pathways will be tailored to the unique environments of the CCCs.

- **Clarifying the path for students.** All courses are designed as part of a coherent pathway with a clear outcome, either transfer or a career outcome. Students understand what a given path will require of them, how the courses in a pathway are connected into a logical sequence that will prepare them for their end goal, what milestones they will meet along the way, and what outcomes they can expect at the end of the path.
- **Helping students get on a path.** Students explore career and/or transfer options before they begin college and extensively in their first year. Multiple measures are used to assess student academic needs. Students receive contextualized, integrated academic support to pass gateway courses.
- **Helping students stay on their path.** Students can easily track their own progress and receive ongoing, intrusive advising. Data systems monitor student progress. Students are provided support or redirected if they fall off track.
- **Ensuring students are learning.** Learning outcomes for every course and program are clear to the student and tied to a specific transfer, completion, or workforce outcome. Systems are in place for the college and students to track mastery of outcomes. Students are engaged in active, collaborative learning experiences. Faculty are leading efforts to improve teaching practices.<sup>43</sup>

Colleges can use the Guided Pathways framework to bring about transformational change, ultimately braiding various funding streams in

service of a singular, coherent plan for improvement. Some colleges have already begun this transformation and the entire system is expected to adopt Guided Pathways over time.

“ Guided pathways with its evidence-based, whole systems approach to aligning efforts across a college to support students in achieving their academic and career goals is the most promising initiative I’ve seen in my 30+ years working in community colleges. ”

— **Rock Pfothenauer**  
Chair, Bay Area Community College Consortium,  
via the Virtual Town Hall

Colleges that are not yet ready to launch a major transformation should still be working to sharpen their focus on students’ end goals. In addition to planning for full Guided Pathways implementation, colleges can take steps in a number of areas. For instance:

- Colleges should be striving to reach the Board of Governors goal of having **100 percent of students complete an education plan** to help students get focused on a clear path from the beginning. Equally important is the quality and frequent updating of those education plans.
- Colleges should augment and enhance student services to **monitor student progress more closely and intervene more assertively**, with strategies such as online tools to help students clearly see their own progress toward their educational goals, alerts that remind students of upcoming deadlines, and automatic flags for intervention when students miss an enrollment deadline or fail a class. Some colleges across the state have also begun to shift to yearly course registration in order to

provide students with a predictable course schedule and lessen the possibility of dropping out mid-year.

- Colleges can also take steps to **foster deeper, more personal relationships between faculty and students**. For example, employing more full-time faculty, improving working conditions and pay for adjuncts to improve retention, and implementing instructional programs and strategies that lead to enhanced quality interactions between students and faculty are all good places to start. In fact, virtually anyone on campus—from department chairs to maintenance workers—can make a difference simply by genuinely interacting with students and asking about their goals, plans and progress on a regular basis.
- Colleges can strive to **carve out more time for faculty to work together to define clear, relevant learning outcomes** in every course and pathway that are aligned to the appropriate career or transfer outcome. Along similar lines, colleges can prioritize **professional development** that helps faculty better assess learning outcomes, communicate learning outcomes to students, and use data to make instructional and program improvements. Colleges can build on the learning outcome structure already in use through the accreditation process.

Collectively, these many actions big and small can help colleges fulfill the commitment to focus relentlessly on students’ end goals.

“ Do not forget the students and focus on what we would need. Ask [students] from time to time: What is it that we can do to benefit you? ”

— **Community College Student Trustee**  
via the Virtual Town Hall

## HOW THE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE CAN LEAD THE WAY

At the state level, the Chancellor should **introduce and continually reinforce the concept of a singular North Star for the system**: helping every student meet his or her defined end goal. Administratively, the Chancellor's Office can use the **Guided Pathways framework to roll out consistent messaging, expectations, strategies, and professional development** that supports successful implementation. In addition, the Chancellor's Office should strive to align the work of other state-level initiatives with the pillars of Guided Pathways, including the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI), the Student Success and Support Program/Student Equity (SSSP/SE), Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), Strong Workforce Program and related workforce categorical programs, Adult Education Block Grant (AEBG), Apprenticeship, education technology programs such as the Online Education Initiative and Common Assessment Initiative, and the forthcoming Innovation Awards. Doing so will bring greater coherence across initiatives.

As part of this commitment, the Chancellor, working with the Board of Governors as needed, should also seek to **amend regulatory and reporting requirements that add little value, do not provide needed information on performance, or even impede colleges' ability to focus relentlessly on students' end goals**. This was a major theme emerging from a recent Chancellor's Office survey of college presidents and in interviews with college personnel: Please help clear burdensome requirements that play no role in improving student success. In addition, the Chancellor should work with the Legislature and Administration to address statutory requirements that present the same problem.

“ The term ‘Pathways’ may sound buzzy, but it opens the door for us to truly **transform our institutions**. The Pathways model calls on us to **assess ourselves and the values and beliefs upon which our institutional systems were built**. Through the **redesign of our systems**, we have the opportunity to **exponentially improve student success and equity**. There's a **comprehensiveness to this model and it will be sobering for us to look in the mirror.** ”

— **Dr. Julianna Barnes**  
President, Cuyamaca College



## COMMITMENT 2: **Always design and decide with the student in mind.**

**“ We have to continue to put students at the center of the conversation. How we get there is always a matter of debate, but we should at least agree on that particular goal. ”**

**— Francisco Rodriguez**  
Chancellor,  
Los Angeles Community College District

Community colleges need to focus much more on the student experience when designing services, programs, and policies. Just as businesses make it easy to find and buy their products, colleges need to make it easy for students to identify the programs, courses, and services they need and to access them at the right time. Too often, this is not the case.

One place where the student experience frequently breaks down is when students are interfacing with multiple departments or offices on a campus, when they are attending more than one community college, or—most challenging to solve—when they are transition from one education system to another. For instance, recent high school graduates entering a community college for the first time can be surprised to learn that they may not be considered ready for entry into collegiate-level coursework, despite perhaps having passed A-G courses in high school or scoring “college ready”

on their 11th grade assessment. Often, the problem leading to this situation is the failure of institutions to align their definitions and expectations; not a failure of the student. When unexpected requirements, hurdles, and delays are sprung on students, it harms the college-student relationship, and more importantly, decreases a student’s odds of success.

Another set of challenges lies with today’s working students, many of whom are commuting enormous distances between home, job, and college—a fragile situation that can easily be thrown off by a family, job or transportation problem. Just as we all have come to rely on digital conveniences to make our lives easier, students are also seeking greater electronic access to everything the CCCs have to offer. Working students in particular need to be able to learn and earn at the same time and access services and information 24 hours a day, from any location. Presently there

are multiple student-facing portals and services, but they do not always line up seamlessly. Online coursework, though expanded in recent years, has yet to become a viable option for all students.

“ **Students are like customers in that we need to pay attention to what they are doing and how we are serving them. Colleges should have to look in the mirror and answer the question ‘Are we doing all we can for our customers?’** ”

— **Allan Zarembeg**  
President and CEO,  
California Chamber of Commerce

## FULFILLING THIS COMMITMENT

To repair and maintain the student experience, colleges and system- and state-level policy makers must **always decide and design with the student in mind**. The CCCs should systematically examine policies and tools at all levels and ask hard questions about how easy community colleges are for students to access and use.

Within the context of a single college, leaders need to **forge greater connectedness across different programs and services** so that they appear seamless to students. When glitches arise, colleges and policy makers must make every attempt to **favor the student’s interests**, helping students move forward toward their end goals, not holding them up.

As a system, the community colleges need to **make and keep clear promises to students**. For many first-generation students, the path into and through higher education can be a long and uncertain journey. At all education

levels, this uncertainty should be mitigated by very clear messages about what students need to do to prepare for college and what they can expect in return—an underlying principle of well-designed College Promise programs that combine financial support, aligned college preparation expectations and supports between K-12 and postsecondary institutions, consistent messaging to students about college and affordability, and clear academic pathways.

In instances where there’s not yet a seamless transitional path or well-developed Promise program, education leaders across disciplines and departments, colleges and sectors, should **adopt a default “hold harmless” policy** for students who are caught between misaligned policies, whether between two colleges or between multiple districts or education sectors. The idea is simple: when students do what is expected of them at the sending institution, the receiving institution should honor it and deliver on what the student is expecting. As a bold example, 12th graders who meet the eligibility standards of UC and CSU (i.e. completing the A-G course pattern and achieving a minimum grade point average) should be automatically eligible for transfer-level courses when they enroll at a community college. If a clear pattern of under-preparedness is apparent, that indicates a need for the college to work urgently with its local K-12 partners to align expectations. Students, however, should be able to access collegiate courses as expected and services to help them catch up.

“ **There is a sizable population of students who have stopped out of community college even though they are close to completion. We should be helping them get their Associate’s degree. Colleges should be helping them to finish their credential by conducting routine degree audits and removing barriers, for example, by waiving small administrative hurdles like library fines or parking fees.** ”

— **Alma Salazar**  
Senior Vice President,  
Los Angeles Area Chamber  
of Commerce

Finally, as a system the CCCs should expand efforts to **meet the needs of working adults**. To reach California’s future workforce demand, it is critical to attract more working adults into college. This will require changes in how, when, and where courses are offered and student services provided. Stackable credentials allow students to gain knowledge and skills that build toward a long-term workforce outcome while offering multiple exit points to employability along the way. Instructional designs that provide on-ramps and off-ramps allow working students to hold down jobs or even stop out temporarily without derailing their forward progress. Recognizing prior learning and releasing students from seat-time in courses is another avenue to providing more flexible access to returning and working adults. Finally, CCCs can continue to foster and strengthen multiple points of entry, whether through bridges from

# More ways to step up service to students

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Community college stakeholders are brimming with ideas for how campuses can improve service to students. Many Virtual Town Hall respondents and interviewees offered examples of practices that are making it easier for students to enroll in classes, take advantage of campus services, and complete their programs of study, including:

- Physically locating services together and cross-training staff so that students experience a one-stop shop, not a bureaucratic maze.
- Greater sharing of data, so that students' records can be easily accessed at the right time by the right person (similar to the strides healthcare has made in making medical records instantly available to every doctor a patient sees).
- Meeting the needs of students who attend multiple colleges, by consolidating course catalogs and schedules across multiple campuses in same district, and providing greater portability of credits across districts.
- Holding more classes at times and in ways that work for students, including weekends, evenings, summer sessions, and online.
- Block-scheduling courses in a given pathway so that students have a convenient and predictable schedule they can plan around.
- Exploring alternative calendars and course formats that are not bound by the traditional 15-week academic calendar.
- Adding more student success courses.
- Expanding the use of open education resources to keep down costs for students and allow faculty to better customize course content.
- Expanding work based learning, employability skills, and job placement supports for students who are exiting into the workforce.

adult education to CTE and general education programs, or through partnerships with local workforce development agencies. Ideally, there should be “no wrong door to knock” when students are seeking job training and education.

“ **The community college system should eliminate ineffective and inefficient regulations that particularly do not drive students to completion, and develop regulations that do. Completion and accountability can be enhanced through the redesign of new regulations.** ”

— **Charlie Ng**

Vice President of Business and Administrative Services,  
Mira Costa Community College District,  
via the Virtual Town Hall

“ **Sometimes it feels like we've set up processes to comply with so many different requirement that I don't even know why we do what we do anymore.** ”

— **Joe Wyse**

Superintendent/President,  
Shasta College

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## HOW THE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE CAN LEAD THE WAY

The Chancellor's leadership position and office should be used to **raise awareness of how CCC students are harmed by misaligned policies** across sectors. The Chancellor should actively advocate to resolve cross-sector and state-level policies that unintentionally penalize students as they move across systems. Additionally, the Chancellor should continue to strengthen partnerships with leaders in other education sectors and workforce development agencies to ensure that students are receiving consistent messages and support regardless of their point of entry (for more on the topic of cross-sector leadership, see Commitment #7).

The Chancellor's Office should do its part to **assist and support colleges in putting students first**, focusing more on outcomes and less on monitoring inputs. At present, colleges have to meet endless requirements and produce myriad proposals, plans, and reports—for accreditation, categorical programs, grant funding, and other purposes. Moving forward, the Chancellor's Office should work to **streamline reporting and other requirements** where possible to help cut through the “noise,” focus on outcomes, and support colleges in holding a singular vision for improvement. Along the same line, the Board of Governors should **prioritize flexibility and results over front-end regulation** when possible. In the past, Board of Governors regulations have occasionally exceeded the law in unhelpful ways. In the future, the Chancellor's Office should help colleges see and utilize the full range of options for serving students best while meeting the law.

The Chancellor's Office should strive to adopt a **stronger customer service mindset** to improve relationships and service to campuses. This should include clear communication from the Chancellor to all staff on system goals and priorities, and clarification that the role of Chancellor's Office staff is to help colleges meet those goals. Like colleges, the Chancellor's Office should strive to **better integrate its own services across traditional siloes**, to achieve more **consistent communication** with colleges and to align mutually reinforcing policies and programs. Feedback received from interviews and Virtual Town Hall respondents reinforced this as a top priority.

The Chancellor's Office should **review its entire education technology portfolio** with the goals of enhancing students' abilities to easily access services and information, and maximizing the ability of faculty and staff to use those systems to serve students effectively. Currently many of the CCC system's technology platforms are managed separately, under different contracts, including the systems used for the college application process, education planning, student learning outcomes and assessments, curriculum inventory, student transcripts, course management and other purposes. The Chancellor's Office should assert greater oversight of these various technologies to ensure they are functioning in alignment with one another and in service of students.

“ [The CCCs should] **simplify the way we do things so the student can witness, first hand, an organization that wants to serve them.** ”

— **College Health Services Assistant**  
via the Virtual Town Hall

“ There is tension among our many missions including workforce development, transfer, and serving adult learners. We need to **serve all students in a holistic way.** It feels disjointed now... and if we are asking colleges to break down siloes, the Chancellor's Office should do it too. ”

— **Julie Bruno**  
President, Academic Senate for  
California Community Colleges





## COMMITMENT 3: **Pair high expectations with high support.**

Many students come to the CCC system with significant academic and personal challenges. Those who are not academically ready to succeed in collegiate-level courses need assistance to strengthen their basic skills. Historically, the system's approach has been to test incoming students for college readiness in English and math and place them into remedial courses if they fail to reach a specified threshold score. While the CCC system has been moving towards the use of "multiple measures" for some time—meaning the use of additional measures of academic readiness—some colleges continue to heavily emphasize test scores for placement. The intentions behind this approach are good: students need to be ready for the rigors of college-level coursework. At the same time, there is compelling evidence that these traditional assessment methods (even when paired with other measures) can sometimes lead educators to misplace students into remedial education who could, with proper supports, succeed in

a collegiate-level course.<sup>44</sup> This pattern of over-placing students into remedial education unnecessarily delays students' progress and can be discouraging to those who are already at risk of dropping out entirely.

Students themselves are often unaware of the significance of assessment exams and do not realize how placement in remedial courses will impact their trajectory through college. One thing is clear: Lengthy, traditional remedial sequences are not effective for most students. By the most recent figures, only about 45 percent of students taking remedial English ultimately move up and pass a collegiate-level English class. In math, only about 33 percent do so.<sup>45</sup> In the interviews conducted for this Strategic Vision, many stakeholders identified remedial education as a top, urgent concern that demands full attention at all levels of the CCC system.

“**Remediation takes a lot of resources, using classroom space, instructor salaries, and the cost of student support services like tutoring and instructional support supplies. Remediation also has the effect of discouraging students from completing their educational goal when they realize they will take much more than two years to obtain transfer level math and English.**”

— **Fermin Ramirez**  
Financial Aid Outreach Coordinator,  
San Bernardino Valley College,  
via the Virtual Town Hall

“ How do we design or envision a new system? A colleague of mine says ‘We always talk about college readiness in K-12, but we never ask colleges if are they student ready.’ If we shift that mindset it will fundamentally change how we deliver our student supports and how we design our system of remediation. ”

— **Jessie Ryan**  
Executive Vice President,  
Campaign for College Opportunity

Just as challenging for colleges is the daunting array of personal challenges that many students are facing. Many people of privilege remember college as a carefree, unburdened chapter in their lives, but this is not the reality for most CCC students. Many live below the poverty line and some struggle with exceptional challenges like homelessness, mental illness, food insecurity, recent emancipation from foster youth services, and challenges associated with returning from military service. Concern about the depth and breadth of students’ needs was a pervasive theme among those responding to the Virtual Town Hall, particularly among those who serve on CCC campuses.

Another issue that contributes to students’ slow progress through college is that many enter community college without enough guidance to establish a clear timeline or sense of direction. They may not be informed about the significant downsides of taking a prolonged time to earn a degree/certificate or transfer, both in opportunity cost of delaying entry into the job market, and the actual cost of supporting themselves for a lengthy period of study. As a result, students often do not think to advocate for higher placements, opportunities to retake placement exams, credit for prior learning, transfer of credits earned at other institutions, and so on. Even if they do think of it, these things are often difficult to accomplish in a bureaucratic environment with multiple offices involved.

## FULFILLING THIS COMMITMENT

In order to establish high expectations and high support for students coming from high school, community colleges and K-12 districts must work together to **address gaps in basic skills before students arrive** at the college campus. This includes better aligned college readiness expectations in the classroom, as well as college planning and interventions for struggling students.

At the college level, there are a number of promising strategies for addressing the problems of remedial education. For example:

- Colleges can continue to **de-emphasize the use of high-stakes tests for placement** and where possible **use more reliable measures of readiness** for collegiate-level coursework, e.g. high school transcripts for students coming directly from high school or examining prior learning for students coming from the military.
- When tests are used for placement, colleges should **help students better prepare for exams**, by communicating clearly and in advance about the content and stakes of the test, providing opportunities for students to take a short refresher course, and offering opportunities to retake tests to improve scores. The system should also consider **allowing students to place themselves**—this can be done using guided self-placement analyses.
- Colleges can also continue to **expand options for students to strengthen basic skills while simultaneously enrolled in collegiate-level courses**. For example, using such tools as tutoring, supported or supplemental instruction, and/or in-class aides has shown promising results.

- For those students who truly require remediation before they can succeed in a collegiate-level course, the system should **continue to refine and expand accelerated and innovative instructional models**, to avoid the years-long remedial sequences that most students never exit, and bolster the use of **contextualized basic skills** to ensure that students see the connection between mathematics, English, and their chosen pathway.

Colleges can also take steps to address students' personal and life challenges in ways that support their in-class learning. For example, colleges can:

- Offer **wraparound supports** to help vulnerable students whose responsibilities and life challenges can interfere with progress toward their end goals. Tutoring, counseling, or help with childcare or transportation are all examples.
- **Create better linkages with county social services agencies** to help eligible students access resources such as food assistance programs, health care, and mental health services, among others.
- **Provide special resources for high-need populations** such as military veterans, former foster youth, and others.

To communicate high expectations to students and encourage them to make efficient progress toward their end goals, colleges can:

- Advise students (especially recent high school graduates) about the benefits of **staying continuously enrolled and taking 15 units per semester**, or even adding one extra course per semester if 15 units is not feasible. This can be facilitated through early enrollment incentives, yearlong course registration, use of summer and intersessions, and block scheduling of, or automatic enrollment in, the courses in a pathway. Wrap-around supports such as those

mentioned above can help students stay continuously enrolled or succeed in taking one extra class. While many older and working students are unable to attend full-time, that should not preclude colleges from helping as many students as possible to do so.

- Encourage **early career exploration** in high school, and as early as middle school, to help students gain context for their studies and a clearer sense of direction.
- Help returning students get back on track if they have left college for a period of time, by **auditing accumulated units, assessing prior learning, and designing customized education plans** that get students started as close to the finish line as possible. Additionally, many of the scheduling and enrollment options noted above are also particularly helpful to returning students.

Of course, as colleges strive to get students to the goal line as quickly as possible, student learning must not suffer. Ensuring that students are learning is at the core of the community college mission, the accreditation process, and one of the pillars of the Guided Pathways framework described in Commitment #1.

“ We must realize that many, if not most, of our CCC students have wellness challenges that, unless met, might lead them to fail, drop out or withdraw from a class/ their classes...or college altogether. These ARE our students, and we must be prepared to do what it takes if we want them to be successful. ”

— **Public Health Nurse and Community College Nurse**  
via Virtual Town Hall

## **HOW THE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE CAN LEAD THE WAY**

The Chancellor should **immediately upgrade the urgency of improving remedial education**. At the leadership level, the Chancellor and system office can support, publicize, and direct resources to effective initiatives that move students through remedial education more efficiently and expeditiously. This may include innovative and accelerated basic skills programs, contextualized instruction, and expanded instructional supports both inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, the Chancellor's Office should provide the needed tools and resources for colleges to revamp assessment and placement practices and policies. The key is to transform assessment, placement, and basic skills instruction in ways that propel students into collegiate level coursework and do not derail their progress. In short, this issue deserves the full attention of system-wide office and must receive it.

The Chancellor should additionally use the high profile nature of the position to **call attention to the immense personal and economic challenges faced by many students** in the CCC system and **advocate for additional resources** to provide the support these students need to succeed academically. The Chancellor can also engage with state lawmakers and officials in health and social services to help better connect CCC students with other public resources that can support them.

The Chancellor should also lead the charge in **communicating with California students their own critical role in their success**. The Chancellor should consistently communicate to K-12 students and families—both directly and through state level policy—that community college requires collegiate-level effort and preparation. The Chancellor should encourage prospective and current students to attend full time if they can, while emphasizing that services and opportunities are available to everyone. Finally, the Chancellor should **advocate for additional state financial aid resources and reforms** that accommodate older/working students as well as expanded support for younger students who can attend college full-time.



## COMMITMENT 4: Foster the use of data, inquiry, and evidence.

We live in a world where massive amounts of data are collected and analyzed to learn about human behavior, drive decision-making, and create products and services. Compared to many sectors, education has been slower to adopt data as a rich source of information to improve services, in part because it is expensive to update data systems and in part because this practice is not central to the institutional culture of higher education. While colleges do collect and report a great deal of data, often it is seen as a compliance activity rather than an opportunity for self-reflection and improvement. Lacking good data, policy makers and educators at all levels often make decisions based on convention, hunches, or anecdotes.

There are a variety of barriers to using data effectively for program improvement in the colleges. Many colleges do not have strong institutional research capacity. College personnel may have limited time and many have not been well trained to use data

for improvement. In college districts and at the state level, multiple data systems tied to different initiatives and departments often do not connect. They may have outdated programming and platforms and require new software.

Lacking a statewide student information system, the Chancellor's Office also faces challenges when aggregating data from district-level information systems across the state. In some instances, varying decision rules and data definitions across districts impede analysis, and the Chancellor's Office does not have sufficient capacity to track down and resolve discrepancies, limiting its ability to research important topics beyond required reports and analyses. Other problems begin at the state or federal level: categorical funding streams often require specific data metrics to be collected, but often they are not in harmony with each other, or with the metrics reported by other education sectors, making it difficult to draw conclusions over time or across silos.

“ Data-driven decision making is more valuable than ever. Objective facts must guide our strategic investments to improve student outcomes. ”

— Hans Johnson

Director, PPIC Higher Education Center  
and Senior Fellow, Public Policy Institute  
of California

“ Performance metrics are only helpful if institutions have the capacity to effectively use them for planning. ”

– CCC Faculty Member

The central office is also hindered by a time lag because it must rely on uploads of data from colleges at designated times, such as the end of the term or end of the year. As a result, the Chancellor and the CCC system office can never access a “real-time,” up-to-the-minute snapshot of performance across the system. This limitation (common in most education sectors) unfortunately sets the stage for the data-reporting process to be more of a compliance activity for colleges and a retrospective activity for the Chancellor’s Office. Given the prohibitive cost and politics associated with establishing a new statewide system, the CCC system will likely need to find other ways to change the collective mindset around data collection and reporting. Far more than being a compliance activity, good data and analysis is needed to drive decision-making, discussion, and change at all levels.

### **FULFILLING THIS COMMITMENT**

To make substantive progress towards the goals outlined earlier in this document, the community college system needs a culture shift that puts data, inquiry, and evidence at the center of planning and decision-making. This culture shift has already begun, but it will be critical to bolster institutional research capacity on campuses to ensure that all colleges can fulfill this commitment.

When designing any new program or policy (or determining the need for one) colleges and policy makers at all levels should always **look first at relevant student data to understand the problem** and inform the development of promising solutions. Likewise, colleges can use student outcome data to determine which investments are less impactful. While it can be painful and controversial to retire programs that are no longer relevant or effective, good data can at least ensure that all parties are operating from the same set of facts.

At every level of the system, all parties should have **regular opportunities to review relevant data on program effectiveness**. College districts can review program data in the course of regular Board meetings, on a set schedule. Colleges can set aside time and provide professional development to help faculty and administrators analyze their data. Or, colleges can bring together the full campus community for annual “all-hands” meetings that involve every department on campus—including student support services, human resources, and operations (e.g., facilities, bookstore, foodservice)—to hear an honest reporting on campus performance and participate in developing strategies to improve student outcomes that are appropriate to each department’s unique role.

## **HOW THE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE CAN LEAD THE WAY**

The system-level office has an especially large role to play in fulfilling this commitment. The Chancellor and system office should **review their own internal data systems and determine how to integrate them** in service of greater transparency, better administration of programs, and better service to both colleges and students. The Chancellor's Office should also explore options for boosting its internal research capacity, ensuring that there are sufficient personnel, and sufficient leadership and direction from the Chancellor to support data-driven decision-making.

Likewise, the Chancellor's Office should review the full array of metrics that colleges are required to report for different purposes, **striving to avoid redundancy and maximize the utility of these data for improving performance**. This work is already underway thanks to similar recommendations made by The Strong Workforce Task Force and adopted by the CCC Board of Governors, which led the Chancellor's Office to administratively rationalize all workforce metrics and pass legislation to reduce dissonance across data definitions. As part of its review of metrics, the system-wide office should also review the official Student Success Scorecard to ensure that it provides a full picture of campus progress toward system-wide goals and is useful in helping colleges focus on the practices and behaviors that will lead to greater student success.

The Chancellor can also routinely **present student outcome data to the Board of Governors** at regular meetings, both to engage the Governors in analysis of particular issues and generally to model good governing board behavior.

Because of the CCCs' unique role at the nexus of the secondary, post-secondary, and workforce development systems, the Chancellor's Office should also look to **expand its role in brokering data-sharing protocols and agreements across those systems**, engaging when necessary at the highest leadership levels to resolve cross-sector data misalignments that are barriers to understanding student outcomes.

The Chancellor's Office should foster inquiry by **embedding data-driven processes into all programs** it administers, building on the momentum of IEPi's inquiry approach and utilizing the data visualization tools and training associated with the Launchboard. By providing or brokering technical assistance to colleges, the Chancellor's Office can help campuses build their capacity to understand their own data and use it for program improvement purposes. As part of their efforts to assist colleges in using data effectively, the Chancellor's Office should also seek ways to leverage the self-reflection already built in to the accreditation process and **avoid unnecessary duplication with other reporting and planning requirements**.



BAKERSFIELD COLLEGE

## COMMITMENT 5: **Take ownership of goals and performance.**

“ **The community college system needs to change its culture to care about student outcomes without blaming the students themselves. The job of the community colleges is to figure out how to educate the students who walk through their doors.** ”

— **Julia Lopez**  
Retired President and CEO,  
College Futures Foundation

The interviews and Virtual Town Hall responses analyzed for this project revealed frustration both inside and outside the colleges around the themes of accountability, capacity, and the pace of change.

Many stakeholders across the state are looking for California’s public system of higher education to step up and unambiguously commit to improvement in student success rates. Among this group, some are aware that the CCC system has goals, but do not find them ambitious enough. Others are frustrated by what they perceive as a victim mentality among the colleges. They do not want excuses for middling results, but rather a solution-oriented mindset that takes responsibility for improving those things that are in the colleges’ control. Perhaps more than anything else, they want a sense of urgency.

At the same time, other stakeholders—mostly internal to the colleges—paint a very different picture. Many faculty and CEOs report having a sense of “initiative fatigue,” and no wonder: the last few years have seen an influx of \$500 million for special programs and purposes—ranging from the Student Success and Support Program, to the Student Equity Program, to a new Online Education Initiative to the creation of the IEPI, all with their own sets of goals and performance indicators. All this change and incoming money, they argue, is a recipe for conflict. They want time for reflection and relationship-building before jumping into a new reform strategy. On the topic of accountability and goals, this group does not want to be criticized for outcomes they cannot control. They raise substantive grievances about the K-12 system failing to prepare students adequately, the State of California underfunding colleges and the Chancellor’s Office, and students not taking their education seriously enough.

This disconnect among stakeholders divides people who otherwise share a similar desire and vision for improvement. In a system that relies heavily on shared governance, it can grind progress to a standstill.

### FULFILLING THIS COMMITMENT

Moving forward, the CCC system must find a way to resolve this disconnect, get behind a shared set of goals, and make the most of available resources.

At both the local and state levels, the CCCs need to **take ownership of goals, and use them to motivate, not punish**. Statewide K-12 education leaders have pursued this kind of supportive, non-punitive approach for the past several years and have found it a refreshing change from the “shame and blame” approach from earlier times. Colleges and local governing boards can similarly pursue a supportive approach by acknowledging the fatigue and anxiety that many faculty, staff, and administrators feel, by limiting and consolidating the burdens placed on faculty by burgeoning state and local initiatives, and by freeing up faculty from non-classroom obligations that are not productive towards helping students meet their end goals. At the same time, the CCC system should embrace ambitious performance goals that signal a real sense of urgency and commitment, and invite all parties to the table to develop robust solutions.

At both the system and college levels, there should be a **clear vision for improvement, including clear goals** for improved student outcomes. The CCC system needs to embrace a small number of high-level statewide goals (SEE PAGE 13) while colleges need to develop and own a more detailed set of goals that are aligned with the

statewide goals but appropriate to the local context. Likewise, the system’s leadership can establish a broad vision for change while local colleges can develop their own, more detailed plans of action. Leaders at both levels should strive to leverage all incoming funding streams to implement their vision for change, not distract from it.

At the system and college level, leaders must **take responsibility for college performance and student outcomes**. Certainly, there are factors beyond the control of the college. At the same time, colleges enjoy significant latitude. Each community college district has its own locally elected board and local academic senate, which together have broad authority to control what happens on campuses. CCCs also have established processes for making decisions in consultation with all internal stakeholders. Compared to community college systems in other states (and the other public higher education sectors in California), the CCC system is largely decentralized, with relatively light oversight from the state or system level and greater oversight at the local level. CCCs also enjoy vastly more autonomy than California’s K-12 system, where the State Board of Education sets curriculum standards, chooses assessments, and can identify and intervene in underperforming districts. Given these freedoms and the tradition of shared governance in the CCC system, CCCs have every reason to take ownership and full responsibility for their own goals and performance.

### CONTRASTING VIEWS ON THE URGENCY FOR REFORM:

“ I’ve lost my patience. We need to say ‘times up’ to colleges. You have to fix it. ”

— State-level education leader

“ It’s about slowing down, having conversations, preserving trust. There is a lot of distrust between faculty and classified staff, faculty and administration, etc. We need to bring different perspectives to the table. ”

— Community college faculty leader

“ The system will do a better job holding itself accountable if the participants on all levels (faculty, staff and administration) do a better job of holding themselves accountable. The challenge is how to measure? It should be simple and clear and connected to the student’s success because education is the core. ”

– College Science  
Lab Coordinator  
via the Virtual Town Hall

## HOW THE CHANCELLOR’S OFFICE CAN LEAD THE WAY

With a new Chancellor in place, the system office is well positioned to revisit existing goals. As proposed earlier (SEE PAGE 13), adopting a handful of clear, ambitious goals at the system level can help orient the colleges toward a shared set of high priorities. The Chancellor’s Office and Board of Governors can reinforce these goals by routinely using them to evaluate system-wide progress and adjust course. The Board of Governors can also do more to recognize and celebrate colleges or programs that meet an objective threshold of success that aligns with the system-wide outcome goals. The Strong Workforce Stars and Rising Stars recognition for colleges reaching specified outcomes is a current example of this.

The Chancellor can also model the kind of behaviors and attitudes that would be helpful at the college level. For instance, the Chancellor should **model a solution-oriented mindset**, focusing on factors within the system’s control and **taking the lead instead of waiting** for the Legislature, Governor, or another education sector to initiate change that affects the CCCs. The Chancellor and system office team should also model good leadership practices such as sticking to a clear vision, focusing on priorities while avoiding distractions, and aligning resources with goals. The steady, focused implementation of recommendations from The Student Success Task Force is a good example of this. Looking forward, Guided Pathways presents another good opportunity for the Chancellor’s Office to model these leadership practices.

Finally, the Chancellor can promote and **adhere to a policy of rigorous transparency** in reporting at every level. Data definitions and rules ought to provide the fullest picture of student achievement possible, even when it is not especially flattering. Wherever possible, the community college system should strive to make all outcome data public-facing and easily accessible, so that any stakeholder can see a clear and complete picture of college and system performance. As a good example, the Strong Workforce Program publicly posts all uses of funds online.<sup>46</sup> The CCC system already has a reputation as an **honest broker of information** in higher education, and the Chancellor can build on it further by committing to being a strong partner to the Administration and Legislature as they seek to understand the performance of the colleges.



## COMMITMENT 6: **Enable action and thoughtful innovation.**

Moving the needle on student outcomes will require calculated risk, careful monitoring, and acceptance that failures will sometimes happen. Too often the system has adopted a risk-averse stance because it is afraid of criticism or penalties, but students deserve more. The CCC system as a whole needs a culture shift that values action over inaction, innovation over the status quo. This change will require creativity and openness among people who are more accustomed to rules and regulation. Rather than asking “why?” decision-makers and gate-keepers at the college and state levels will need to start asking “why not?”

At the same time, policy makers at all levels need to sharpen and refine the way they think about innovation. Like any industry, it is easy to latch on to the latest “shiny new object,” but it is critical for colleges to avoid adopting a new technology or methodology merely because it is new. It needs to be part of a coherent overall plan.

### **FULFILLING THIS COMMITMENT**

Moving forward, colleges should **think carefully about which innovations will track closely with state and local goals.** For instance, those innovations that help students learn better and reach their goals, help faculty assess learning outcomes, or help student services personnel monitor student behavior are all worthy of calculated risk.

Of course, the varying approaches to innovation must be both **thoughtful and deliberate**, with leaders first looking at the data to determine the underlying problems, then choosing among potential solutions. **Results should be tracked early and often**, with colleges adjusting course when necessary. If new strategies don’t work, they should be viewed as opportunities to learn and improve. As a system, it is crucial to reward action and thoughtful innovation, not point fingers when results are less than anticipated.

“ **There is an opportunity in every moment, if you choose to seek the vision and act on it. The only thing restricting change is to not change.** ”

— **Member of the public**  
via the Virtual Town Hall

## Examples of Promising Innovations

Across California, colleges are pushing forward on many fronts, launching innovative programs and using new technologies to improve student success, such as:

- Using improved assessment and diagnostic tools in targeted, specific ways to support student learning, such as pinpointing basic skills gaps and using the information to assign individualized skill-building exercises to students.
- Using predictive analysis of students' grades and high school courses to inform placement of students into collegiate-level coursework.
- Developing new methods for assessing the prior learning of adult learners by allowing older students to count valuable skills and knowledge gained in other settings (e.g. the military or workplace) toward their desired degree, credential, or transfer.
- Facilitating regional coordination among colleges to address labor market gaps in the region and prepare students for the workforce.

Additionally, by request of the Governor, the CCC system over the coming year will explore establishing a fully online community college to provide full and open access to the opportunities of the CCCs.



“ When the economy sours, enrollment spikes and funding drops...It is difficult to plan any long term plans or identify a future vision when there is so much uncertainty in funding and there is a huge lack of planning that is probably stemming from these factors. I see this as the largest challenge to success in the California Community College system today. ”

— **Community College Vice President**  
via the Virtual Town Hall

At the state level, it is critical for California to think beyond technological innovations for improving the CCC system, and additionally consider **policy and funding innovations**. Many individuals interviewed for this project or participating in the Virtual Town Hall pointed to the limitations of traditional models of enrollment accounting and “seat time” funding. They noted that these models often restrict colleges from implementing promising new practices, fail to target resources effectively, and create funding volatility that impedes long-term planning. Correcting these structural flaws is not a simple matter, nor one that the Chancellor’s Office can tackle alone. A systemwide conversation is needed to consider how current funding mechanisms interfere with CCC performance. Even long-standing policies must be reconsidered if it’s clear they are getting in the way of progress.

## HOW THE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE CAN LEAD THE WAY

The Chancellor should make it clear that the system office should **enable, not stifle, innovation on the ground**. The Chancellor can commit to fostering a culture of open-mindedness and creativity to support colleges that want to try a promising new idea. The Chancellor can also commit to providing political back-up to thoughtful innovators, **offering support, not blame**, when experiments fall short despite good planning.

Additionally, the Chancellor should encourage the Board of Governors to seek ways to **use flexibility as a tool for motivating change and best practices** when possible. For instance, the Chancellor's Office should explore ways to **loosen or waive those categorical program requirements** that are barriers to thoughtful innovation. The Chancellor should work with partners in state government to explore policy and funding innovations that would provide greater flexibility in exchange for demonstrated success, exemptions from rigid seat-time requirements in certain instances that stimulate improved student outcomes, and solutions to address the volatility and instability of enrollment-driven funding.

The Chancellor's Office should continue its work to understand how to **take innovations to scale effectively and rapidly**. As an example, the Doing What Matters for Jobs and the Economy initiative has quickly scaled a program that addresses employer concerns over the lack of "soft skills" among graduates, starting with a network of 10 colleges at first, then expanding to 22 the following year and 35 the year after that. Lessons learned from this approach can benefit the Chancellor's Office as it implements other reform strategies.

Finally, the Chancellor's Office should **shine a spotlight on good ideas** by creating peer-to-peer forums that foster sharing of best practices, including examining and highlighting successful regional models for practices that can potentially be scaled system-wide.

“ We could do a much better job if we could have more control over our colleges, how we spend our money, and how we meet the needs of our students. We have incredibly talented faculty, staff and administrators at our colleges, but they spend much of their time trying to work around regulations that get in the way, rather than focusing on the true issues that will move the needle on student success and completion. ”

— Jane Harmon, Ph.D.

Interim Chancellor,  
Yosemite Community College District,  
via Virtual Town Hall



## COMMITMENT 7: Lead the work of partnering across systems.

“ When looking for change, we don’t have a united voice. As education systems we are doing a lot of things in opposition to each other. We can do a lot more good when advocating for change together. ”

— Alejandro Lomeli  
Student Leader

On the natural, education systems build toward self-sustenance and autonomy. This is good for systems and the institutions within them, but not always good for students. As documented by numerous studies, students experience significant barriers and disconnects when moving from one system to another.<sup>47</sup> Without strong linkages between K-12 schools and community colleges, the state is limiting access and opportunity for students. Without strong linkages to UC, CSU, and the workforce development system, community colleges are unintentionally hampering students’ future prospects. The task now is to reverse engineer California’s public education system to make it work better for students, even if that means giving up a piece of turf or control.

Unlike other states, California doesn’t have a coordinating body or central authority at the state level to oversee higher education, meaning that postsecondary education leaders must

themselves drive the many cross-sector discussions and negotiations needed to function as a connected system of higher education. Some regions are doing this effectively, but most are not. At the state level, there is some activity to coordinate across sectors. For instance, a few years ago the CCC and CSU systems collaborated closely on Associate Degrees for Transfer, an important reform for streamlining transfer pathways for students. More recently, workforce system leaders have engaged with the community colleges to develop a framework for regional collaboration, as required by state and federal policies. And this year, the Board of Governors and the K-12 State Board of Education have activated a Joint Advisory on Workforce Pathways to discuss shared policy imperatives. These are all steps in the right direction, but not sufficient or systemic enough to address the array of cross-system issues that need attention.

## FULFILLING THIS COMMITMENT

Moving forward, education leaders need to meet across education systems much more frequently, in more depth, and with more personnel dedicated to the task. This is true at both the state and regional levels.

There are at least three major cross-system issue areas that need attention:

- The first is **continued work between the CCCs and partners at UC, CSU, and private universities to simplify transfer pathways for students**. As an overarching design principle, all parties should strive to simplify the process rather than create elaborate communications and counseling systems to help students navigate an overly complicated path.
- A second area is **ongoing feedback between CCC technical education programs, workforce development programs, and employers**. These activities should also be coordinated with K-12 and the other post-secondary education systems, to provide consistent messaging to students and avoid a cacophony of requests to businesses and industry groups.
- A third area for emphasis is forming an **active partnership with the K-12 system to align messaging, expectations, and policy**. Collectively, we need to enhance the way we communicate about community college readiness and the need for early career exploration to students, families, and educators. The state must seek productive ways for CCC and K-12 faculty to work together across sectors to break down an “us versus them” mentality and make real progress on aligning expectations and curriculum. Each party must accept responsibility for building these linkages and also for fixing problems that arise from failures to communicate and partner effectively.

## **HOW THE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE CAN LEAD THE WAY**

The Chancellor's Office should **model the kind of cross-sector collaboration and leadership at the state level** that needs to be seen at the local level. To this end, the Chancellor should initiate joint meetings with peers at the UC, CSU, workforce development, and K-12 systems to address priority issues.

The Chancellor should also **call on the leaders of other education sectors to help address issues that affect students transferring from CCCs**, such as impaction policies that limit the enrollment of transfer-ready CCC students or institutions not honoring Associate Degrees for Transfer as expected. The Chancellor should also encourage both UC and CSU to join in adopting the global principle of holding students harmless for poor alignment and communication across the sectors (SEE PAGE 21). Additionally, the Chancellor should work with other education sector leaders to share student data safely and securely, allowing CCCs to better understand which students are moving into other systems and whether they are persisting and succeeding.

Finally, the Chancellor should **lead a statewide conversation about the collective impact of our higher education system** on social and economic mobility, taking the same, rigorously transparent approach proposed for the community college system. The Chancellor should work with partners in K-12, CSU, UC, and the workforce development system to set long-term goals for improvement. By setting and owning goals together, collectively, California's education segments can skip the finger-pointing and move ahead with finding shared solutions.

# Join the Vision for Success

In interviews and the Virtual Town Hall, many stakeholders commented that this moment represents a ripe opportunity for the California Community Colleges (CCCs). They cited a growing national awareness about income inequality and the need for accessible opportunities for upward mobility. They mentioned California's relatively robust investments in CCCs in recent years and the Governor's and Legislature's continued interest in supporting change and improvement in the colleges. Finally, they mentioned the leadership potential of the new Chancellor. To many individuals inside and outside the CCC system, this moment represents an opportunity for transformational change.

Still, this opportunity will not be realized without collective action. This document lays out ambitious goals and a set of comprehensive commitments to achieve those goals. Together these commitments are a call to action that extends to every individual in the college system. All personnel in the college system can embrace the seven commitments and make changes big and small that help move the system closer to its goals. The CCCs have always strived to help their students reach their full potential. Now is the time for the colleges themselves to reach their full potential as California's engine of social and economic mobility. It will take courage and persistence, but California's students deserve no less.

This call to action must extend beyond the colleges as well, to all Californians, because the success of the CCCs is essential to the success of our state as a whole. For those who work outside the CCC system, there are plenty of ways to stay involved and contribute. You can, for example:

- Attend your local college district board meetings and ask questions about the district or college's goals, performance, and plans for improvement.
- Watch the state level Board of Governors meetings online. Write to the Board about your concerns.
- Write to your state legislator and voice your support for the CCCs.
- Talk to the community colleges students you know and ask them about their educational and life goals. Support them—emotionally, academically, or financially—as they work towards those goals.
- Attend a community college graduation ceremony to celebrate the hard work of CCC faculty, administrators, and students themselves.

Regardless of one's role inside or outside of the colleges, every individual can join in the commitments, follow the collective progress of community colleges, and hold our system leaders accountable. No less than California's future is at stake.

“ The CCC system should deliberate, discuss, and engage in discourse with all Californians with regard to the topics discussed here. Without dialogue, truth cannot present itself. With continuous dialogue with all stakeholders, California will benefit. ”

— Member of the public  
via the Virtual Town Hall

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