

# Dual Enrollment and Transfer: Driving Baccalaureate Degree Attainment

February 6, 2026

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This discussion paper connects Vision 2030’s baccalaureate attainment actions to the collective work required across intersegmental educational systems, state agencies, and private nonprofit partners to expand high-quality dual enrollment, strengthen effective transfer structures, and advance baccalaureate attainment statewide. Advancing early college momentum at scale depends on sustained collaboration among K–12 education, community colleges, four-year universities, state partners, and nonprofit organizations to align policy, funding, advising, curriculum, and student supports around clear pathways to transfer and baccalaureate degree completion.

## Introduction: Vision 2030: Equitable Baccalaureate Attainment

Baccalaureate attainment is central to California’s economic mobility, workforce competitiveness, and equity goals, and it is increasingly urgent. In 2015, the [Public Policy Institute of California](#) projected that the state could face a shortfall of approximately 1.1 million college graduates by 2030, driven by growing demand for highly educated workers and large-scale retirements from the labor force. By 2030, 38% of California jobs are expected to require at least a baccalaureate degree, while only about 33% of workers are projected to hold one. This projected mismatch is more than a workforce challenge; it is an equity challenge. Students who have been historically underserved are most likely to face the greatest barriers to completing a baccalaureate degree. It should be noted that associate degrees are high-value access credentials, especially for speed, affordability, and immediate labor market entry. Baccalaureate degrees, however, remain the dominant economic mobility credential for long-term earnings growth, career resilience, and pathways to leadership opportunities. California higher education should strengthen systems and pathways from an associate to baccalaureate attainment without losing equity, time, or earnings momentum. Bottom line, all associate degrees should be a route to a baccalaureate degree.

Vision 2030 calls on the California Community Colleges to accelerate baccalaureate attainment through a both-and strategy—one that strengthens dual enrollment, modernizes transfer, and expands the community college baccalaureate, all leading to degree completion through clear, connected pathways. The Community College Baccalaureate is addressed in a separate paper. This document focuses specifically on transfer pathways and how they can be strengthened and streamlined.

- First, the system must build early momentum through **dual enrollment** that is intentionally aligned to transfer and baccalaureate outcomes. Vision 2030’s “ninth-grade strategy” envisions a future in which every California high school student is on a clearly defined path—transfer, career, or apprenticeship—and graduates with at least 12 units of college credit, including students in noncredit and adult education high school diploma or equivalency programs. When dual enrollment coursework is transferable, sequenced into

program maps, and supported by advising and planning tools, it functions as the on-ramp to the baccalaureate degree pathway. Early exposure to college-level expectations and credits reduces remediation, excess unit accumulation, and time to degree particularly for students who might otherwise enter college without momentum.

- Second, the system must strengthen **transfer** pathways to four-year universities through the Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT). This includes streamlining articulation and major preparation, expanding counseling and advising capacity, reducing excess units, and fully leveraging the ADT as California’s most effective and equitable transfer structure. Evidence consistently shows that improving transfer pathways and expanding transfer-guarantee associate degrees such as the ADT where student credits transfer seamlessly, to more majors and destinations is among the most promising strategies for increasing baccalaureate degree attainment statewide.
- Third, the system must expand **community college baccalaureate degree** programs in high-demand, applied, workforce-aligned fields based on regional needs to serve place-bound learners, working adults, and regions with limited or no access to four-year campuses—complementing, not competing with, transfer pathways and baccalaureate programs at four-year universities.

This Baccalaureate Attainment brief focuses primarily on (1) **Dual Enrollment** and (2) **Transfer**. The **Community College Baccalaureate Degree** is addressed in a separate brief.

## 1. Expanding Dual Enrollment Pathways

California serves approximately 1.8 million public high school students, the vast majority of whom will rely on a community college as their primary entry point to higher education. Vision 2030 identifies dual enrollment students as a priority learner population. Early exposure to college coursework is strongly associated with improved persistence, transfer, and degree completion. Yet participation remains limited and uneven. Statewide, only about one in ten high school students participate in dual enrollment, with participation increasing sharply in the final years of high school. Far fewer students engage in college coursework during the first and second years of high school, precisely when early momentum has the greatest long-term impact.

Access to dual enrollment is highly uneven across the state. Opportunities often depend on the high school a student attends, local capacity, or college district-level priorities rather than student potential. As a result, students who have historically been excluded from advanced coursework and early college opportunities, first-generation students, students from low-income backgrounds, and students in rural or under-resourced communities, are less likely to benefit from dual enrollment’s momentum-building effects.

Vision 2030 articulates a clear and ambitious aspiration: a future in which every ninth-grade student is on a defined pathway—transfer, career, or apprenticeship—and graduates with at least 12 units of college credit. Achieving this goal would fundamentally change the trajectory for many California students by reducing barriers to transfer, shortening time to degree, and increasing the likelihood that students progress efficiently toward a baccalaureate degree.

### Connected Dual Enrollment

Every dual enrollment student should receive coordinated advising from both K-12 and community college professionals, be able to view transfer destinations through Program

Pathways Mapper (PPM), understand financial and scheduling implications, trust that the credits earned will count as predicted at the transfer institutions. When dual enrollment is designed this way, with ADT alignment, credit certainty and momentum are assured.

High-quality, baccalaureate-aligned dual enrollment programs consistently include:

- ADT-aligned course offerings, ensuring that high school students complete lower-division coursework that advances major preparation rather than generating excess units.
- Coordinated advising and onboarding protocols, with clear cross-system responsibilities so students understand how credits transfer and what steps follow after high school graduation.
- Implementation of Program Pathways Mapper early-college maps, providing student-facing, login-free roadmaps that connect dual enrollment options to ADTs and transfer destinations.
- Professional learning opportunities for faculty, including counselors, aligned across K-12 and community colleges, to support inclusive recruitment, equity-minded advising, and ADT-centered pathway design.

### The McFarland Experience – Early Momentum in Practice

McFarland High School provides a compelling example of what is possible when dual enrollment is embedded as a default and structured baccalaureate pathway rather than a limited enrichment opportunity – *wall-to-wall dual enrollment*. Serving a student population that is 98% Hispanic/Latino and approximately 90% socioeconomically disadvantaged, McFarland demonstrates that high-impact outcomes are achievable when early college momentum is paired with clear pathway design and sustained supports.

For the Class of 2024, 98.6% of students graduated with college credit, and 58.3% completed full postsecondary pathways, earning certificates or degrees while still in high school. Student success rates exceeded institutional benchmarks by more than 10 percentage points, underscoring the impact of aligning dual enrollment coursework with intentional program sequencing, proactive advising, and integrated student supports.

Critically, McFarland should be a model as a prototype, rather than an exception or outlier. Their success was driven by system choices that made early college participation, credit accumulation, and pathway clarity as the norm. These results were not dependent upon selective admissions or atypical student characteristics. The model illustrates that early momentum can be reliably translated into postsecondary success when the right conditions are in place, even in communities facing significant structural barriers.

Scaling a McFarland model statewide to reach similar outcomes as the McFarland program requires focusing on the conditions for success that colleges and districts and their governing boards may influence, particularly across regions with varying capacity and student needs. These conditions include:

- Clear expectations that dual enrollment is pathway-aligned, with coursework intentionally mapped to ADTs or community college baccalaureate degrees, rather than offered as stand-alone course credit

- Integrated and coordinated advising and onboarding across K–12 and community colleges, so students and families understand how early college credit connects to transfer and baccalaureate degree completion
- Student-facing planning tools, such as Program Pathways Mapper, to ensure program pathways are visible, navigable, and consistent across colleges and regions
- Targeted, equity-centered student supports, including transportation, fee waivers, academic coaching, and culturally responsive outreach, to ensure early momentum is equitably accessible
- Intersegmental commitments from transfer partners to honor ADT-aligned coursework and minimize credit loss and excess units
- Sustained investment and accountability, including data-informed monitoring of early momentum, ADT completion, and transfer outcomes

These conditions align directly with the [Vision 2030 Transfer Workplan](#), and taken together, they suggest that scaling a McFarland model across California is achievable, not by replicating a single program, but by aligning policy, funding, and accountability around a shared definition of high-quality, pathway-centered dual enrollment.

### **Action Strategy: The California Equitable Dual Enrollment Initiative**

To ensure K-12 and college districts are equipped for a successful dual enrollment program, a proposed California Equitable Dual Enrollment Initiative is being explored as a three-year, statewide technical assistance and implementation strategy, led by the California Department of Education in partnership with the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office and the State Board of Education. Rather than funding isolated programs, the Initiative invests in the people, structures, and supports required to make dual enrollment a standard, pathway-aligned practice across diverse contexts.

The proposed Initiative is explicitly aligned with Vision 2030 goals. Participating K-12 and college districts would first commit to ensuring that all students graduate with meaningful, transferable college credit, with coursework intentionally mapped to ADTs or community college baccalaureate degree pathways. Over time, the Initiative is designed to establish regional exemplars that will inform expansion across the state, creating durable infrastructure for scaling early momentum and baccalaureate attainment. In this way, the proposed California Equitable Dual Enrollment Initiative functions as the operational engine for the broader Vision 2030 outcomes, translating shared goals into consistent practice across regions, institutions, and student populations.

## **2. Advancing Transfer through the Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT)**

Baccalaureate attainment through transfer is the dominant route taken by California students, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, and working adults. California’s students depend on effective partnerships between California community colleges and transfer or receiving institutions where support for clear transfer pathways with credit mobility is prioritized. That is, the community colleges must design transparent, unambiguous, and high-quality transfer pathways composed of coursework with streamlined credit mobility to CSU, UC, AICCU, HBCU, and out-of-state universities. It should be noted that credit mobility is determined by the receiving institutions, not the California community colleges. The Associate

Degree for Transfer (ADT), a result of SB 1440 (Padilla, 2010) and subsequent legislation such as SB 440 (Padilla, 2013), AB 928 (Berman, 2021), AB 1111 (Berman, 2021), and AB 2057 (Berman, 2024) is designed so that students who earn an ADT have a seamless transfer to four-year universities that have agreed to accept the ADT as a transfer package and are ready to begin as a junior in a similar baccalaureate degree program.

### A Structural Challenge

Evidence consistently shows that California’s transfer challenge is a problem of structural fragmentation across systems, not a lack of student aspiration. In collaboration with partners invested in transfer, the Chancellor’s Office has **identified five persistent barriers** that undermine transfer success: disconnected higher education systems, complex and inconsistent pathways, varying campus requirements, uncertain credit mobility, and disjointed financial aid planning. Together, these barriers increase excess unit accumulation, extend time to degree, and raise the total cost of a baccalaureate degree, especially for students who are place-bound or navigating higher education for the first time.

The [California State Auditor Report](#), “California Systems of Public Higher Education” (2023), which focused on transfer, reinforces the areas of structural fragmentation. The audit found that about 21% of transfer-intending community college students transferred within four years, with many students never reaching the application stage due to unclear, shifting, or inconsistent requirements. Importantly, the audit identified the ADT as California’s most effective existing mechanism for streamlining transfer, while also concluding that its impact is limited by uneven implementation and insufficient intersegmental coordination.

### The Associate Degree for Transfer

When fully honored and aligned, the Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) provides clarity, certainty, and efficiency—the very conditions most lacking in California’s transfer landscape. As implemented with CSU partners, the ADT:

- Guarantees admission to the CSU system with junior standing for students who complete an ADT created under the transfer model curriculum, a state-approved process
- Aligns 60 (semester) lower-division community college units with 60 (semester) upper-division university units, significantly reducing time and cost to a baccalaureate degree—AB 927 and AB 2057 made some exceptions to the 60 lower-division units for high unit STEM majors.
- Improves credit certainty, minimizing the risk of credit loss when students transfer on a similar pathway

### Strengthening the ADT as a Statewide Baccalaureate Strategy

While the ADT is anchored in CCC–CSU guarantees, its full potential has yet to be realized. A critical next step is to strengthen ADT-aligned pathways across the broader transfer ecosystem, including UC where applicable, independent nonprofit universities, fully online institutions, and HBCU partners that formally recognize ADTs and offer transfer-friendly degree pathways. Expanding these aligned destinations increases geographic and scheduling flexibility for working

adults and place-bound students while preserving the core principles of credit certainty and time-to-degree.

Realizing this potential **requires deepening intersegmental coordination**. Research and practice point to several priority actions aligned with Vision 2030:

- Standardizing transfer pathways across systems and campuses, so students are not required to prepare for multiple, competing sets of requirements
- Strengthening ADT acceptance and alignment, particularly at nearby CSU and UC campuses where place-bound students have limited transfer options
- Improving credit mobility, recognizing that students who transfer all of their credits are nearly twice as likely to complete a baccalaureate degree as those who lose credits during the transfer process
- Replacing fragmented transfer tools with integrated, student-centered planning systems, such as Program Pathways Mapper, that clarify pathways early and continuously
- Addressing disjointed financial aid planning, so students can understand and plan for the full cost and duration of a baccalaureate degree across institutions.

#### Policy Foundation: AB 928 and AB 1111 — From Complexity to Clarity

Two recent statewide reforms, Assembly Bill 928 (Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act) and Assembly Bill 1111 (Common Course Numbering) provide the strongest policy foundation California has ever had for creating a clear, student-centered, and equitable transfer framework.

- AB 928 establishes the structural and governance backbone for transfer reform. It created a statewide intersegmental implementation committee charged with strengthening Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) pathways, reducing excess unit accumulation, improving articulation, and enhancing coordination across the California Community Colleges, CSU, and UC systems. AB 928 also advances a simplified, unified lower-division general education pathway (Cal-GETC) accepted by both CSU and UC, significantly reducing the number of decisions and requirements students must navigate when preparing to transfer.
- AB 1111 addresses a complementary and equally critical barrier: course-level similarity and inconsistency on such determinations. For decades, students have been required to interpret whether courses with different titles, numbers, and descriptions across colleges and universities were “the same,” often leading to credit loss, excess unit accumulation, or delayed transfer. AB 1111 establishes common course numbering among the California community colleges, ensuring that comparable courses carry the same course number statewide. This reform shifts the burden of interpretation from students to the system, where it belongs.

When implemented as intended, AB 928 and AB 1111 move California from a transfer system that relies on student navigation and insider knowledge to one built on clarity, predictability, and equity by design. They enable students, beginning as early as high school, to determine which

courses count for transfer credit, how those courses apply toward an ADT, and how that ADT guarantees transfer to a baccalaureate degree program.<sup>1</sup>

Embedding ADT-aligned and common-numbered coursework into dual enrollment pathways allows students to begin a streamlined transfer roadmap while still in high school. When combined with Program Pathways Mapper, and strengthened intersegmental agreements, these reforms directly address the structural barriers that have historically limited transfer success: unclear requirements, excess unit accumulation, and inconsistent credit acceptance.

### **Action Strategy: Expanding Transfer and Strengthening the Baccalaureate Ecosystem with Independent Nonprofit Universities, Fully Online Partners, and HBCU Pathways**

While the Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) provides a clear and powerful guarantee to the CSU system, the full promise of ADT-centered transfer depends on engaging a broader ecosystem of transfer and receiving institutions including independent nonprofit universities (such as AICCU member institutions), fully online universities, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as aligned partners.

To fully realize this potential, the system must strengthen these partnerships around a shared set of principles that mirror the intent of AB 928 and AB 1111: clarity, credit certainty, and equity by design. Key elements to consider when engaging with independent nonprofit, online, and HBCU partners include:

- Honoring the ADT as a complete transfer structure, by aligning major preparation, accepting the full ADT package toward degree requirements, and minimizing additional lower-division coursework after transfer
- Investing in credit mobility, ensuring that community college coursework applies transparently and efficiently to baccalaureate degree programs—reducing credit loss, excess units, and time to degree
- Expanding affordability for CCC transfer students, through tuition guarantees, transfer-specific scholarships, fee waivers, and coordinated financial aid packages
- Scaling HBCU transfer pathways and affordability, including targeted use of the Cal-HBCU Transfer Grant for ADT completers enrolling at eligible HBCU partner institutions.
- Strengthening student wayfinding and advising, through coordinated outreach, shared planning tools such as Program Pathways Mapper, and dedicated transfer advising supports that help students identify the right destination and stay on path.

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<sup>1</sup> Statewide evidence reinforces this strategy. For example, the [Campaign for College Opportunity's Pathway Champions Awards](#) recognize community colleges and CSU campuses that are improving transfer outcomes through equitable implementation of ADTs, stronger transfer-level English and math completion, and intentional collaboration between sending and receiving institutions. These exemplars demonstrate that when ADTs are expanded, clearly communicated, and fully honored, students—especially Black, Latinx, first-generation, and low-income students—transfer at higher rates and complete baccalaureate degrees more efficiently.

Elevating these partnerships—such as with National University,<sup>2</sup> Western Governors University, and AICCU partners—alongside CSU and UC pathways supports a broader statewide goal: a diversified, equitable transfer ecosystem in which more institutions fully honor community college learning, reduce total cost, and accelerate baccalaureate degree attainment—without requiring students to navigate complexity on their own.

### **Action Strategy: Rural College Transfer Collaborative**

Geography remains a persistent barrier to equitable transfer and baccalaureate attainment. To address this, the Vision 2030 Transfer Workplan includes the Rural College Transfer Collaborative Demonstration Project to expand access to ADT pathways, particularly in STEM and other high-demand fields for rural and place-bound learners. The Collaborative advances baccalaureate attainment by:

- Building multi-college partnerships to share course offerings across rural-serving colleges.
- Leveraging the California Virtual Campus (CVC) and other platforms to deliver transferable coursework.
- Using Program Pathways Mapper to make cross-college transfer pathways visible and navigable.
- Establishing regional transfer partnership agreements with four-year institutions.
- Providing tailored student supports for learners enrolled at one or multiple colleges.

Initial participating colleges include Butte, College of the Redwoods, Feather River College, Lassen College, Lake Tahoe Community, Mendocino College, Shasta College, and Woodland Community College. This demonstration project directly advances Vision 2030 outcomes for ADT completion and transfer as well as also encourage and support expanded community college baccalaureate degree options in rural regions.

### **Action Strategy: Program Pathways Mapper (PPM)**

A critical enabler of this work is Program Pathways Mapper (PPM)—a student-facing technology platform that makes program requirements and transfer pathways transparent from high school through baccalaureate completion. PPM strengthens dual enrollment and transfer alignment by:

- Supporting early exploration without barriers, as the platform requires no login and is accessible to prospective students

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the latest systemwide memorandum of understanding with National University guarantees admission to California Community College students who earn an Associate Degree for Transfer in a similar major pathway and meet any additional institutional requirements. Under the agreement, ADT completers are granted junior standing, with at least 60 semester units (90 quarter units) transferable, and no more than an additional 60 semester units (90 quarter units) required to complete a baccalaureate degree in a comparable program. The ADT also satisfies National University's lower-division general education requirements, eliminating duplicative coursework, and participating students receive a 46 percent tuition scholarship, significantly reducing the total cost of degree completion.

- Allowing students to compare transfer destinations and see required lower-division coursework
- Supporting early-college mapping, including dual and concurrent enrollment sequences
- Aligning directly with transfer pathways, Cal-GETC, and common course numbering to reduce excess unit accumulation and credit loss
- Reinforcing 3 of the 4 Guided Pathways Pillars by clarifying the path, guiding students to enter the path, helping students stay on the path
- Implementing PPM to provide needed infrastructure to scale clarity, consistency, and equity across California's transfer ecosystem by growing adoption across community colleges, CSUs, UCs, and other institutions

### **Priorities for Board Consideration**

To advance equitable baccalaureate attainment through dual enrollment and transfer, the Board of Governors may consider the following priorities:

- Affirm **dual enrollment** as a route to equitable baccalaureate attainment by incentivizing the alignment of dual enrollment course offerings with ADT pathways, building early momentum toward transfer and degree completion such as the McFarland model.
- Support **deepening the intersegmental coordination** among CSU, UC, AICCU, HBCU, and other out-of-state universities to increase transfer, reduce excess unit accumulation, and streamline credit mobility.