



California Community Colleges



A Union of Educators & Classified Professionals



California School Employees Association



March 27, 2025



Senator Scott Wiener, Chair
Senate Budget Committee
1021 O Street, Room 8620
Sacramento, CA 95814

Assemblymember Jesse Gabriel, Chair
Assembly Budget Committee
1021 O Street, Suite 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814



SAN JOSÉ EVERGREEN
Community College District



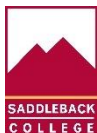
Senator John Laird, Chair
Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 1
1021 O Street, Room 8720
Sacramento, CA 95814

Assemblymember David Alvarez, Chair
Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 3
1021 O Street, Suite 5320
Sacramento, CA 95814



RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY
COLLEGE DISTRICT

RE: Investing in Equitable Career Pathways for Californians



Dear Legislative Budget Chairs:

On behalf of a diverse coalition of equity-minded leaders, advocates, and institutions, we thank you for your ongoing support of the California Community Colleges and respectfully request your continued partnership to connect more Californians with promising careers. While our 116 campuses serve more than 2.1 million students annually, California is home to [6.8 million adults](#) without a college degree, many of whom are from marginalized

communities and who struggle to find gainful employment. The [Master Plan for Career Education](#) charts a course to lift these low-wage workers into living-wage jobs, a core focus of our [Vision 2030](#) roadmap to proactively bring college directly to our under-resourced communities and equitably strengthen access, support, and success.

The Governor's January budget proposal includes targeted investments to advance the Master Plan's goals, including a career passport that recognizes marketable skills from work-based experiences and streamlines career pathways for justice-involved Californians. We are also grateful that the Governor's proposed budget provides several cost-of-living adjustments to address districts' growing inflationary cost-drivers. Additional funding to make college affordable and accessible and expand workforce training partnerships will position our system as trailblazers in economic and social mobility. **We urge you to support the Governor's proposal and prioritize the following career-oriented budget investments to advance the learner-centered goals of the Master Plan and Vision 2030.**

Career Passport

The Master Plan delivers a groundbreaking approach to braid skill building and higher education together, enabling adult workers to take on the empowering role of adult learner. By championing the following technology proposals, the California Community Colleges will possess the data tools to identify and recognize all forms of student learning, even if it occurs outside the traditional classroom environment.

Support Investments in Technology Solutions to Let Student Data Flow: We strongly support the Governor's budget proposals to develop, strengthen, and optimize technology systems to increase socioeconomic mobility for underserved Californians. The **Common Cloud Data Platform** will provide real-time information on student's course-taking patterns, units earned, and progress toward a degree or certificate, allowing colleges to reform and enhance program mapping in alignment with students' ultimate career goals, as well as conduct just-in-time interventions that result in student persistence and completion. It will integrate a suite of student-facing advising tools to ensure the seamless transfer of credits between our institutions and our four-year universities, employers, and workforce training partners. By leveraging data analytics, the Common Cloud will enable our institutions to equip working learners and adult students with academic supports and in-demand labor skills.

The **Statewide Technology Transformation Project** will design an integrated technological platform that includes student, finance, and human resources information systems to protect against cybersecurity vulnerabilities, reduce manual processes, and deliver equitable student, faculty, and staff experiences. It will achieve cost-savings that can be redirected toward student services, standardize data collection resulting in easier, timelier, and more accurate reporting, and support the ongoing implementation of the Cradle to Career Data System.

Together, these investments will establish a holistic foundation for managing community college data, resources, and operations, greatly accelerating our system's ability to analyze, understand, and make systemwide student outcomes available more urgently and scale evidence-based practices through data-informed decision-making.

Support the Integration of Credit for Prior Learning Within Student Career Pathways: We remain strong advocates of **Credit for Prior Learning**, a powerful economic lever that recognizes that our military veterans and other trained professionals may have formal education and skills they can prove in a campus setting, so they do not have to take courses in subjects they have long ago mastered.

Credit for Prior Learning directly advances California’s vision of preparing all learners for high-skill, high-wage jobs by bridging the divide between industry skills and college credits. The Governor’s proposed budget will provide colleges with a new funding source to establish employer-backed competency frameworks, supporting the transition from education to earning through fast-tracked student completion. Additional funding will provide faculty release time and technical assistance to ensure frameworks at one college are shareable and adoptable at other colleges, fostering a transparent ecosystem aligned with individual learner goals.

Career Pathways

The Master Plan realizes there is an ever-increasing need for skills acquisition in California’s growing 21st century economy, especially as emerging technologies create new economic demands. In the age of climate change and artificial intelligence, the Master Plan is a blueprint on how California can produce the workforce of tomorrow by seeking out adult learners who have been harmed by persistent access barriers and granting them equitable opportunities to contribute to California’s advanced economy.

Support the Expansion of the Rising Scholars Network: The Rising Scholars Network equips justice-involved individuals with degree-granting programs in correctional facilities and on-campus support at California’s community colleges. Currently serving over 90 facilities across the state—including youth facilities, state prisons, county jails, and federal prisons—the program addresses the educational needs of a vulnerable population of over 200,000 incarcerated individuals.

The Governor’s proposed budget investment in the **Rising Scholars Network** will expand access and strengthen academic support, fostering success for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students while contributing to a more inclusive higher education landscape. By providing equitable learning and workforce opportunities to justice-impacted Californians, this initiative can transform lives, reduce recidivism rates, and increase college degree attainment and entry into rewarding careers.

Accessibility and Affordability

The Master Plan calls on educators and workforce training providers to further develop and refine joint strategies for building student awareness and access to safety net programs. We ask you to support the following proposals that will maximize student receipt of financial resources, remove barriers to access, and provide additional program and service flexibility for colleges to meet students’ diverse needs.

Fully Fund Community College Enrollment Growth: Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, California’s community colleges have made significant strides in increasing enrollment. Fall 2023 saw an 8% growth in student enrollment relative to Fall 2022, and Spring 2024 saw a 9% growth relative to Spring 2023, with disproportionately larger enrollment gains among formerly incarcerated students, veteran students, students 35 years and older, and African American students. These students will form the backbone of California’s workforce, and they are poised to make strong contributions to our

future economy. However, insufficient growth funding in the annual state budget fails to support enrollment increases that colleges have worked so hard to achieve and disincentivizes future efforts to include growth in strategic enrollment management plans. This ultimately hurts students and their ability to meet their career goals. To sustain this progress, we request that the Legislature provide additional funding for **enrollment growth** to reward districts for growing their student populations through intentional and innovative outreach practices.

Provide Inflationary Adjustments to Address Increasing Costs for Categorical Programs: The California Community Colleges manage over 40 categorical programs that are critical to achieving the student success goals outlined in Vision 2030, many of which serve historically underserved students. Our colleges have put in place institutional infrastructures to implement and administer these programs, including employees who are paid from these funds. In recent years, some categorical programs have COLAs while others have not, posing challenges to maintaining adequate staffing and other infrastructure in an environment of increasing costs and high inflation. Without COLAs, districts struggle to sustain these vital programs, forcing difficult budget decisions. We request the Legislature **provide COLAs** for all ongoing categorical programs, prioritizing technology-related programs and services to address the rapid advances of artificial intelligence within the campus environment and guard the system against potential fraud.

Continue Investments in Affordable Student Housing: Housing is the largest expense for college students, often exceeding the cost of tuition. One in five community college students have experienced homelessness. To address housing insecurity, we request the Legislature adopt a statewide lease revenue bond to provide an additional \$1.1 billion to support up to 35 **affordable student housing projects**. Student housing is more than shelter—it is a support strategy to holistically address student needs, including financial aid, transportation, and social services, through partnerships with local agencies and nonprofit organizations.

Provide Additional Resources for Financial Aid Administration: The Student Financial Aid Administration (SFAA) program has not received a COLA adjustment since 2003, leaving financial aid offices struggling to keep up with rising costs, while taking on more responsibilities. Staff administer a growing number of financial aid programs and respond to new reporting obligations. Additionally, the challenges and delays with implementing the revised Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) have placed new workload burdens on college financial aid offices. To increase student access to financial aid, we need high impact strategies and solutions. We request an additional \$10 million ongoing for **financial aid administration**, which will enable more students to receive timely assistance in filling out financial aid applications and qualify for state and federal programs designed to cover their true cost of attendance.

Workforce Training

The Master Plan calls for collaborative partnerships to enhance education and training pathways. Closer collaboration with our labor and economic development partners through programs such as the **California Apprenticeship Initiative** will ensure that our programs are well designed to meet their evolving economic needs.

Expand Training Pathways Through the California Apprenticeship Initiative: The California Apprenticeship Initiative, launched in 2016, provides grants to community colleges, school districts,

and partners to develop innovative apprenticeship opportunities in high-growth sectors such as biotechnology and advanced manufacturing. Since the program was originally initiated, demand for flexible workforce training and "earn-and-learn" opportunities continues to rise among community colleges and business partners. The program is currently funded at \$30 million and in the most recent grant cycle, the Chancellor's Office received 209 applications for almost \$115 million, resulting in nearly two-thirds of candidates being turned away. To support the Governor's ambitious goal of 500,000 apprenticeships by 2029, we request a \$60 million ongoing increase to **expand the growth of registered apprenticeships** statewide. These funds will incentivize new partnerships with our business and industry partners to create a prepared workforce pipeline that is responsive to the needs of employers and priority sectors.

California's community colleges are indispensable, and investment in them is investment in our state's present and future prosperity. Our colleges constitute an accessible path to a better life for generations of working-class Californians. Now is the time to holistically address their career aspirations by supporting data-based, learner-centered strategies to bring college to them, with equity and at scale. Thank you for your consideration of the California Community Colleges 2025-26 budget priorities.

Sincerely,

California Community College Coalition Partners

cc:

Members, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 1 on Education

Members, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 3 on Education Finance

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