



INTRODUCTION TO CHANCELLOR’S OFFICE MONOGRAPH SERIES

The [Chancellor’s Office](#) has initiated a series of monographs that connect [Vision 2030’s](#) priorities to federal and state investments in higher education. These documents highlight advances in different areas of our roadmap and why policymakers’ continued support is important.

Across the workforce, prospective and existing employees are facing a changing landscape that requires new skills to adapt to new strategies and technologies. For existing employees and their employers, the appetite for skill development outpaces the capacity — in time and finances — to devote to skill-building. But employers’ focus on skill-hiring and employees’ focus on the ever-increasing need for skills acquisition only continues to grow in California’s expanding 21st century economy.

The California Community Colleges is comprised of 116 colleges and serves 2 million students in rural, urban and suburban communities. Collectively, the California Community Colleges represents nearly one-quarter of all community college students in the United States. The California Community Colleges is a leading provider of career and workforce training in the country, making it uniquely suited to serve as a facilitator of skill and capacity development among existing workers. Indeed, California is investing billions of dollars in workforce development through this unique and expansive training network of community colleges spread out in every regional and local economy throughout the state.

OVERVIEW OF APPRENTICESHIPS IN CALIFORNIA

THE OPPORTUNITY

Apprenticeships are a key component of advancing equity in education, especially for today’s students who are often older, have working and caregiving responsibilities for families and children, and come from families of low income. Apprenticeship opportunities provide students with the chance to earn credit toward a certificate or degree through on-the-job training or experiential learning in the classroom — relieving the pressure to sacrifice income for learning. It effectively takes down the long-standing barriers in education between learning and work,

allowing the student to earn a wage while learning and enabling the employer to play a key role in working with community college faculty in skills instructional design. This produces an employer-driven skills development plan and on-the-job training and provides workers who are job-ready upon completion.¹ These programs provide pathways that offer particular benefits for employers in the following areas:

- **Workforce:** Employers benefit from a pipeline of highly skilled workers who have undergone rigorous, hands-on training in their specific field.
- **Costs:** Employers save on recruitment expenses by training apprentices who are then retained within the company.
- **Productivity:** Trained apprentices contribute to increased productivity and efficiency within the workplace due to their tailored skills and knowledge.
- **Training:** Employers can influence and shape the training program to ensure it meets their specific needs and industry standards.
- **Retention:** Companies see lower turnover rates because apprentices often stay with the employer who invested in their training and development.
- **Reputation:** Companies that engage in apprenticeship programs enhance the company's reputation as a community-focused and supportive employer.

Beyond a streamlined, trusted process to train employees who represent the current and new generation of the workforce, apprenticeships also connect employers to a network of [peers across industries](#).² Moreover, by training students with in-demand skills, businesses can fill essential roles, leading to increased productivity and growth while strengthening the regional and local economy throughout California and expanding the local tax base while stimulating more economic activity. For local communities, college and employer investment in apprenticeships often lead to a decrease in local unemployment rates. As local businesses thrive, they create more job opportunities — over the past 25 years, two of every three jobs were created by small businesses, forming a positive and sustaining cycle of economic development and mobility.

Though apprenticeships' work and impact are evident, there remains an opportunity to further the existing efforts on state and federal levels to expand access to these opportunities for students entering the workforce, for existing employees and more.

CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND APPRENTICESHIPS

The Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges, the Chancellor and leadership within California's community colleges recognize the opportunity to expand access to learning, build relationships with employers and help students achieve their goals through apprenticeships. As a part of that work, Chancellor Sonya Christian — through Vision 2030 —

launched an Apprentice Pathways Demonstration Project in 2023.³ The project will engage 27 colleges, or nearly one-quarter of all colleges in the system, to create a roadmap to engage students in credit-bearing apprenticeships. The concept behind the demonstration project is for colleges to employ credit for prior learning to award credit for the apprenticeships, providing students with a direct path to certificates and degrees, employment, and upward social and economic mobility. The project could provide a statewide, and potentially a national, model for apprenticeships.

Federal Policies and Apprenticeships:

Apprenticeship programs received much-needed investments and expansions under former presidents Obama⁴ and Trump.⁵ These investments not only build experience for future leaders of California's workforce but put workers on a path to economic mobility and stability through accessible opportunity and training. President Joe Biden has built on that progress with bold leadership and boisterous support of registered apprenticeships.⁶ These actions have included reinstating an apprenticeship advisory committee, which will provide those closest to these programs with the opportunity to help expand them, and removing industry standards for apprenticeships, which could undermine the values of registered apprenticeships with regard to critical characteristics, like wage progression. Earlier this year, the Biden administration also announced a record investment of \$244 million to modernize and expand apprenticeship programs.⁷ This unprecedented show of support and commitment will directly benefit Californians.

State Policies and Apprenticeships

California leads the United States in the number of apprentices and apprenticeship programs, with more than double the number of apprentices of the country's runner-up, Texas.⁸ This accolade comes with a responsibility that state leaders have continually committed to uphold and overdeliver on — particularly for apprenticeships. State leaders earmarked vital funds totaling more than \$220 billion for apprenticeship programs in the 2023-24 budget, benefitting numerous initiatives, including the California Community Colleges' [California Apprenticeship Initiative](#).⁹ Further, these investments have been bolstered by the most recent bill signed into law, which reduces the information gap and requires school districts to share apprenticeship information with rising juniors and seniors.¹⁰

This legislation helps to strengthen the apprenticeship pathway that the demonstration project is helping to build: starting with high school students dually enrolled in a community college and designated as a “youth apprentice” undertaking career exploration; leading to a pre-apprentice in community college noncredit and contract education courses as an adult; and continuing on to an apprentice who, supported by credit-for-prior learning, enrolled in credit-bearing degrees, including the community college baccalaureate. These baccalaureate degrees, now offered at 45 of the California Community Colleges' 116 community colleges, are in areas

of applied learning or career technical education, like mortuary science or biotechnology, and are ideally suited for apprenticeship programs at community colleges. This progress continues the state's steps toward the bold goal of creating 500,000 apprenticeship opportunities by 2029, which Governor Gavin Newsom set in 2018.¹¹

A PATHWAY TO ECONOMIC MOBILITY

Apprenticeships provide a pathway to economic mobility, especially for disadvantaged students and students of color, helping them break the cycle of poverty and build better futures. The skills gained through these programs empower individuals to navigate their careers with confidence. Collaboration among educators, businesses and policymakers is essential to expanding apprenticeships and ensuring they are accessible to all, strengthening both individuals and communities.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLES

California has a storied history of combining innovation with partnerships to create opportunities to power the future of the state and bring more people into the workforce. The following case studies offer some examples of this work in action to support critical industries that Californians depend on every day. Moreover, they offer a snapshot of the strategy behind apprenticeship programs, which takes a data-based approach (labor market data) to determine areas of need across the eight distinctly different regional economies in California, which is the fifth largest in the world — a position held since 2017 — at \$3.8 trillion in 2023, representing 14% of the total economy of the United States.

EXAMPLE 1: HEALTHCARE PARTNERSHIPS

Healthcare workers have taken on an even greater importance in society — both in service and in the nation's psyche, following the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this increased recognition, California¹² and the nation at large¹³ face a shortfall in nurses. The shortage reaches from rural¹⁴ and urban areas to military bases,¹⁵ leading to “healthcare deserts” where residents who do not have access to basic care are forced to travel sometimes long distances.¹⁶ These conditions further exacerbate the existing inequities, which means elderly and people of color are more likely to go without convenient access to care.

The nursing workforce development demonstration project will address the nursing shortfall by (1) identifying areas of greatest need and gaps in existing programs; (2) developing new nursing curricula and programs; (3) helping students achieve Bachelor of Science in Nursing degrees at four-year universities; (4) providing additional student support, including counseling and internship, apprenticeship and job placement opportunities; and (5) expanding the successful apprenticeship program that allows licensed vocational nurses to become registered nurses.

California's community colleges, leveraging their reach and accessibility into diverse communities across the state, have launched critical partnerships to boost educational capacity to build the next generation of nurses. Together, the California Department of Health Care Access and Information, the California Community Colleges and key employer partners, including major hospital systems like Sutter Health and Kaiser Permanente, are addressing the regional nurse shortage by expanding clinical sites and fostering mutual benefits for both colleges and hospitals. The system has launched partnerships at 12 colleges: Butte College, Cabrillo College, Monterey Peninsula College, Modesto Junior College, Bakersfield College, Cuesta College, Ventura College, Golden West College, Saddleback College, Mt. San Jacinto College, Riverside City College and College of the Desert.¹⁷

EXAMPLE 2: UNION PARTNERSHIPS

Unions represent more than 2 million workers in California alone.¹⁸ This dual opportunity provides a pathway to build long-term relationships with employers to ensure programs are responsive to workforce needs as well as employees who are seeking to gain skills and grow their wages. By partnering with unions across the workforce, those who need this support most can be assured that apprenticeships have relevant degrees and certificates attached to it.

The California Community Colleges has begun to build these partnerships to build the workforce that serves as the backbone of many industries across the state. In 2023, the California Community College Chancellor's Office announced separate partnerships with the United Domestic Workers¹⁹ and the Service Employees International Union-United Healthcare Workforce²⁰ to provide educational pathways that will open doors for more skills and opportunities to gain better wages. Another critical partner has been the building and construction trades for our traditional apprenticeship programs.

Building and Construction Trade Partners

Apprenticeship programs in the building and construction trades play a vital role in developing a skilled workforce to meet industry demands, especially with recent federal infrastructure investments. These programs offer hands-on training in areas like carpentry, plumbing, and electrical work, ensuring apprentices gain practical skills while addressing labor shortages. The California Community Colleges have partnered with over 22 trade organizations, fostering training across more than 51 trades, including electricians, plumbers, and HVAC technicians. These partnerships contribute significantly to job creation, economic growth, and the overall strength of California's construction industry, helping meet the state's housing needs.

EXAMPLE 3: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

The Chancellor's Office has established strategic partnerships with program sponsors and intermediaries like the LAUNCH (Local Apprenticeship Uniting a Network of Colleges and High

Schools) Apprenticeship Network and Jobs for the Future (JFF) to support the successful launch of apprenticeship programs. LAUNCH brings together educators, businesses and community partners, including California's 45 Workforce Development Boards, to align training with employer needs. These partnerships ensure that apprenticeship programs are market-relevant and sustainable for the long term.

APPRENTICESHIP IN ACTION: SANTIAGO CANYON COLLEGE

Santiago Canyon College (SCC) offers a range of registered apprenticeship programs in the building and construction trades, including fields like electrician, carpenter, and operating engineer. The college is expanding into nontraditional sectors, such as nursing and teaching apprenticeships. Graduates receive a Certificate of Completion from California's Division of Apprenticeship Standards, and many programs also lead to advanced degrees or certificates at no additional cost.

Apprenticeship programs at SCC have a life-changing impact, as seen in the story of Vicente Lopez, who transitioned from construction work to a maintenance mechanic apprenticeship with the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. Through a combination of on-the-job training and classroom instruction, Lopez gained valuable skills and progressed to a six-figure salary. The program's hands-on approach provides apprentices with raises and promotions every six months, preparing them for successful careers.

RESULTS

Apprenticeships provide a pathway to economic mobility, especially for disadvantaged students and students of color, helping them break the cycle of poverty and build better futures. The skills gained through these programs empower individuals to navigate their careers with confidence. Collaboration among educators, businesses and policymakers is essential to expanding apprenticeships and ensuring they are accessible to all, strengthening both individuals and communities.

GROWING PARTICIPATION

According to a recent JFF landscape analysis, California's state leaders and advocates for apprenticeship programs are making substantial progress in expanding access and meeting Governor Gavin Newsom's goal of creating 500,000 apprenticeships by 2029. The report notes that the number of apprentices registered with the Division of Apprenticeship Standards grew 11%, with the most growth in manufacturing, healthcare, barbers and cosmetologists, and IT—though other sectors also saw growth.¹⁰

CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES: LEADING THE WAY

California community colleges are key to achieving Newsom’s goal of registering 500,000 apprentices by 2029, under the leadership of Chancellor Christian. The California Community Colleges, as the largest higher education system in the U.S., with 116 and 2 million students, and community colleges within the system play a critical role in workforce development. Leading colleges in apprenticeship registrations include American River College, Santiago Canyon College and Foothill College.

MAKING THE CASE FOR APPRENTICESHIPS

MEETING WORKFORCE NEEDS

According to the Public Policy Institute of California’s 2023 report, California — and the United States — faces a looming skills gap as more jobs require advanced training and skills.²¹ Community colleges are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap and increase skill development while opening pathways to degree attainment. Through Vision 2030, the California Community Colleges has expanded its focus on apprenticeships through partnerships to support employees and employers. According to a JFF analysis, the opportunity and need for continued scaling for additional funding and partnerships remain to meet the demand for apprenticeships.¹⁰

OUR TIME IS NOW

With California as the nation’s most diverse state and with a growing population of leaders who are ready to enter the workforce, apprenticeships offer a pathway to increase equity and build cross-sector partnerships to ensure California’s workforce is not just supported and secure but that existing and hopeful workers know they are supported. The California Community Colleges stands alongside our federal and state government in our commitment to apprenticeship programs to realize California students’ dreams and ambitions as well as enhancing the future of the workforce in the golden state.

Citations

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