




GOVERNOR
GAVIN NEWSOM

CALIFORNIA'S
MASTER PLAN
FOR
CAREER
EDUCATION

2025

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The Master Plan for Career Education will prepare all learners for the workforce of tomorrow by guiding California in its efforts to strengthen career pathways, prioritize hands-on learning and real-life skills, and advance access and affordability through streamlined collaboration and partnership so that all Californians can navigate toward career-sustaining jobs.

Rapid changes in California’s economy, paired with persistent gaps in opportunity and economic mobility, are driving the need for California to take a fresh look at how the state prepares people for school and work. **Currently, California has one of the widest gaps in income distribution in the country. The top 10 percent of earners—those who make an average of more than \$300,000 per year—earn 10 times more than families at the bottom 10 percent of the scale, who must scrape by on only \$29,000.** This gap has been fueled by earnings gains among educated workers. Households with an earner who has a bachelor’s degree are making 33 percent more now than similar households did in 1980, while households in which no one has graduated from college have seen wages decline by 8 percent.¹

In the 1960s, California’s Master Plan for Higher Education created a strong foundation for learning by delineating roles across various postsecondary education segments, including the California Community College, California State University, and University of California systems. This plan was predicated on a labor market that predominantly featured jobs requiring minimal formal education. Yet, as the 21st century unfolds, California’s economy and workforce have transformed. Schools, colleges, and workforce training providers need to create new strategies that allow systems to evolve and be more responsive to rapidly changing workforce needs, particularly with the advent of artificial intelligence and the recognition that learners should have the ability to upskill throughout their careers.

California has responded to this need by funding learning opportunities through a broad range of mechanisms, including TK–12 and postsecondary education; workforce training provided by workforce boards; adult schools; apprenticeships; and programs focused on specific populations such as students who are English language learners, people with disabilities, or people who are incarcerated. For example, Governor Gavin Newsom and the

Legislature invested \$7.3 billion in efforts ranging from apprenticeships to strengthened education workforce pathways to climate innovation.²

However, these education and training programs are resourced through numerous agencies, different base funding streams, and various specialized grant programs. Although these programs may have similar goals, they often require separate plans, applications, and implementation components. As a result, efforts are splintered, educators must scramble to secure the resources they need to sustain their work, and potential learners struggle to find the right training and job options to meet their goals.

The economic divide underscores the imperative for a more coherent career education infrastructure that is forward-looking, equitable, accessible, and aligned with California's diverse needs. **Degree attainment cannot be the only pathway to stable, well-paid work.** Even though individuals with bachelor's degrees earn significantly more over their lifetimes than those without, degrees are not a panacea, particularly in the absence of practical experience and social capital. Moreover, the financial burden of education poses significant barriers for many Californians, particularly as driven by the high cost of living and compounded by the complexities of accessing public benefits that would make education more affordable.

Therefore, in August 2023, Governor Gavin Newsom called for a new **Master Plan for Career Education through the Freedom to Succeed Executive Order**. He urged state agencies and institutions of higher education to increase equitable access to well-paid jobs by creating and strengthening education and training pathways that are responsive to the emerging needs of the economy and specific to sectors, regions, and individuals' skills and experience. These pathways will ensure that all Californians—whether young people just starting their first job searches

or experienced workers seeking new careers—can find opportunities for high-paying and fulfilling career paths that do not require college degrees. By building these talent pipelines, the state can power economic growth and create more resilient communities in strategic sectors such as education, health care, and climate.

The Master Plan for Career Education provides a framework for responding to the complex, multifaceted challenges confronting California's labor market and educational landscape. This plan, which builds on the 1960 plan, acknowledges the shifting demographics of college attendees and the changing nature of work—with automation and artificial intelligence reshaping job categories and skill requirements—and provides flexibility to address new challenges that will emerge in the future. In addition to identifying priority areas for future action, it provides examples of work already underway that could be scaled and replicated to attain shared goals.

To support the development of the Master Plan for Career Education, representatives of state agencies and higher education provided initial strategies, regional partners convened community members to design solutions, and interest holders provided direct input on how to address persistent barriers to opportunity. **Across all these forums, agencies and community members highlighted two central themes: Enhance coordination and address structural barriers that make it difficult for Californians to navigate education, workforce training, and public benefit systems.**

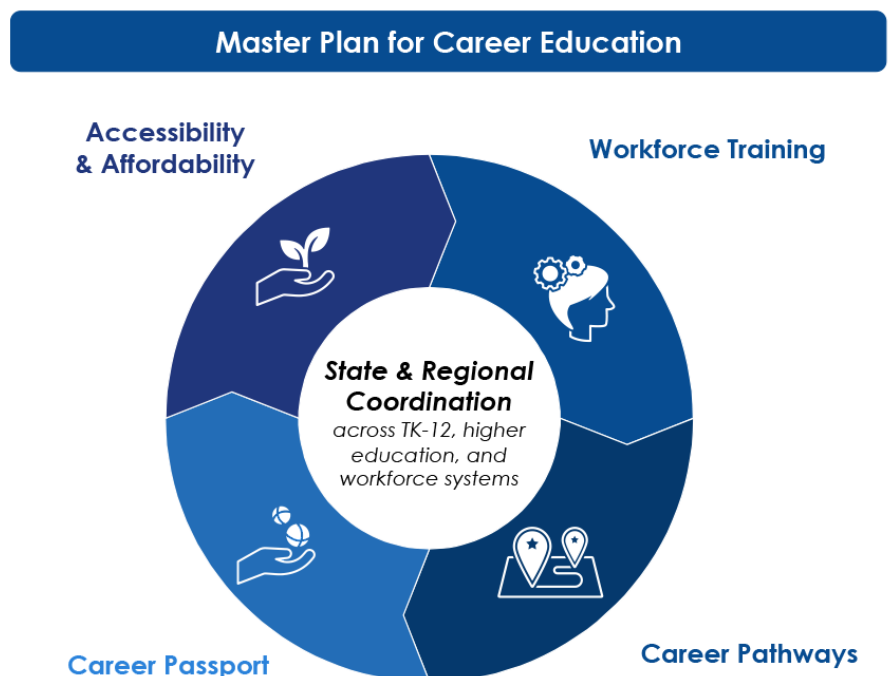
The call to enhance coordination has focused on the need for spaces at the state and regional levels where educators, workforce training providers, employers, and community members can collaboratively forge career pathways tailored to the evolving economic landscape and the state's strategic sectors. A coordinated effort is crucial for capitalizing on programmatic funding opportunities and adapting to the demands of a workforce increasingly

shaped by artificial intelligence and climate imperatives. **Through collective action, resources can be optimized, enabling a more effective delivery of services statewide while ensuring that education and training programs provide stronger hands-on learning that is aligned with employment opportunities.**

When envisioning specific interventions, agencies and the community frequently focused on the needs of specific populations and the unique challenges that hamper access to and successful completion of education and workforce training programs. For example, many interest holders spelled out the precise needs of people with disabilities, young people who are neither working nor in school (*“opportunity youth”*), and English language learners. However, when listing the structural changes that would unlock opportunity, they provided recommendations that are remarkably consistent and include

- improving interagency planning and coordination;
- strengthening data sharing;
- alerting learners to educational and job opportunities;
- ensuring people have chances to explore options in a hands-on way and to build connections with employers;
- providing “earn-and-learn” opportunities whereby people can be paid as they gain skills;
- developing stackable credentials that ensure learning opportunities are built on each other;
- creating stronger support for housing, food, childcare, transportation, health care, and other basic needs;
- offering navigators that help people access services and address challenges; and
- recognizing that populations are not monolithic and that individuals may have multiple identities and experiences that should be addressed holistically.

By taking a universal design approach—designing systems so they are inherently accessible to all learners regardless of their varied needs and circumstances—California could simultaneously expand access for a wide variety of learners and free up resources to provide more customized support for specific populations.



1

THE MASTER PLAN FOR CAREER EDUCATION CALLS FOR A COORDINATED, UNIVERSAL DESIGN APPROACH THROUGH SIX PRIMARY AREAS OF ACTION.

Create a State Planning and Coordinating Body

Governor Gavin Newsom, working with the Legislature, should create a new statewide planning and coordinating body that brings together the state's education segments, workforce training providers, and employers. The coordinating body should evaluate changing economic needs and demand for skills, develop sector-based and cross-sector strategies, create statewide goals, align federal and state plans, coordinate efforts to maximize funding, coordinate implementation of specific federal and state programs, codesign programs to address workforce opportunities, and connect with regions.

- By offering shared tools and resources, state agencies and institutions of higher education can provide seamless transitions for learners as they move across service providers. For example, they can work together to provide eTranscript California as the state's postsecondary transcript platform, align college and career advising information, and use information from the Cradle-to-Career Data System to inform their decisions.
- With improved labor market information, state agencies and institutions of higher education can align programs with in-demand skills; ensure that the state is graduating enough people with high-demand skills; support career navigation through student advising that uses common definitions across systems; and leverage the strategic sectors highlighted in the California Jobs First Economic Blueprint.
- Through reviewing economic changes and demands for new skills, the statewide planning and coordinating body should discuss and strategize implications for TK–12 and higher education curricula.

2

Strengthen Regional Coordination

The Governor's Office should evaluate how successful regional coordination models can be expanded to create sustainable forums in which educators, workforce training providers, and employers work together with a clear division of responsibilities across partners.

- The first step in determining how best to leverage existing regional structures for more comprehensive coordination is to assess regional assets and challenges related to regional collaboration. By documenting processes for shared decision-making, this information could support action planning to strengthen collaborative processes and structures in each region in partnership with regional interest holders.
- When aligning regional coordinating efforts, regional coordinating bodies can place greater emphasis on strengthening employer engagement by, for example, identifying critical skills for the workplace and expanding opportunities for work-based learning, with a focus on building social capital and creating earn-and-learn opportunities such as paid internships and apprenticeships.
- Regions should develop mechanisms that coordinate funding for similar programs so educators can secure funding by submitting fewer proposals, track a consistent set of outcomes, and sustain resources over longer periods of time.

3

Support Skills-Based Hiring Through a Career Passport

State agencies and institutions of higher education should make it easier for employers to make hiring decisions based on individuals' skills in addition to their academic credentials.

- To ensure that Career Passport provides information in a manner that will fit into hiring practices for specific sectors, the Office of Cradle-to-Career Data can lead a planning process that includes educators, workforce training professionals, and employers.
- As a way to build stronger pathways to state service jobs, the Career Passport can be used by the California Department of Human Resources (CalHR) to assess how apprenticeship, language skills, and service learning inform eligibility for jobs.
- Building on the California Jobs First Economic Blueprint, the state can identify additional sectors that could help inform the development of the Career Passport.
- By having a skills framework that is validated by both academics and employers, California employers can accelerate skills-based hiring practices and colleges can recognize skills and competencies for educational credit.

4

Develop Career Pathways for High School and College Students

While some students have access to career pathway opportunities, access is not the norm for all students. Pushing for universal availability and implementation of pathways programs would provide students from all backgrounds with clear roadmaps to gainful employment and career advancement. These pathways can be designed to provide experiential learning opportunities, shorten the time to a career, alleviate financial pressures, and empower individuals to actualize their dreams, all while contributing to social and economic mobility within communities.

- TK–12 and postsecondary agencies should establish career pathways that align with current and future statewide and regional workforce needs. These pathways can begin in high school and extend through postsecondary education and workforce training.
- Pathways should have built-in opportunities for high school students to take college courses (“dual enrollment”) that allow them to earn industry-recognized credentials and complete courses that count toward associate and bachelor’s degrees.
- High schools and colleges should provide students with opportunities to engage in work-based learning, including internships, service learning, pre-apprenticeships, and apprenticeships.
- Educators should ensure that all students are able to explore their passions and career opportunities, including groups that have had less access to higher education, such as people with disabilities, people of color, and English language learners.
- TK–12 schools and colleges should provide support systems, such as advisory structures, to ensure that students are attached to caring professionals responsible for their guidance and welfare.
- TK–12 schools and colleges should adopt competency-based methods of documenting mastery of knowledge and skills.

5

Strengthen Workforce Training for Young People and Adults

For adults who need additional training and for opportunity youth, education and workforce development agencies should ensure access to education, workforce training, and jobs that allow them to advance in stable, well-paying career pathways.


- A service delivery network of job centers, community colleges, adult schools, extension centers, libraries, county jails, state prisons, and community-based organizations can create an affordable “no wrong door” approach to education and workforce training opportunities.
- By strengthening coordination, state agencies and institutions of higher education can deliver joint programs focused on specific populations, such as people with disabilities, English language learners, students in families with mixed-citizenship status, and people involved with the justice system.
- Sector-based pathways that are aligned with worker and opportunity youth needs, use cohorts to encourage social connections, include work-based learning, and provide earn-and-learn opportunities can improve coordination between workforce training programs and community colleges.
- By strengthening coordinated faculty-led processes for reviewing skills, colleges can accelerate adoption of credit for prior learning to recognize skills, knowledge, and abilities gained outside of the classroom.

6

Increase Access to and Affordability of Education and Workforce Training

State agencies and institutions of higher education should ensure that eligible learners from all backgrounds and parts of the state can easily access education, workforce training, and public benefits that open doors to rewarding, well-paying jobs.

- By addressing barriers that have historically made access to education and workforce training out of reach for some populations, state agencies and institutions of higher education can increase access and success for learners such as people with disabilities, opportunity youth, students whose parents did not attend college (“first-generation students”), and English language learners. They can also ensure that educators and workforce training providers have the skills to support those populations’ specific needs.
- By improving awareness of and access to public benefits, state agencies and institutions of higher education can support non-tuition costs for eligible students.
- Streamlining the eligibility process for public benefits and leveraging federal workforce dollars can support adult learners to pay for college courses.
- By working collaboratively with employers, education and workforce training providers can improve universal access to earn-and-learn opportunities, such as apprenticeships, paid internships, and service learning.



California's Master Plan for Career Education is a FORWARD-THINKING RESPONSE to the pressing need to make education and workforce training programs easier for all Californians to access and the need to address the ever-evolving economic landscape.

The plan's comprehensive approach—**emphasizing state and regional coordination, the implementation of universal design principles, and the integration of innovative strategies**—holds the promise of transforming the state's educational and workforce training systems. By fostering collaboration and simplifying access, the plan is poised to create inclusive pathways to prosperity that resonate with California's diverse communities. It not only seeks to dismantle the structural barriers that hinder economic mobility but also serves as a model for ensuring that education and training adapt to the demands of a dynamic workforce. **The Master Plan for Career Education stands as a testament to California's commitment to equipping all students and workers—regardless of background or circumstance—with the tools necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing world.**

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Throughout this document, terms associated with education and workforce training are described in plain language wherever possible. In addition, Appendix A provides a glossary of key terms.



Changes in Education and the Workforce

In 1960, California adopted the Master Plan for Higher Education³ to help Californians attain postsecondary education that would prepare them for work and life. The plan established clear roles for three postsecondary segments.

Community colleges would offer lower-division classes that are transferable to 4-year colleges, provide remedial training, and offer career-focused programs, culminating in certificates and associate degrees. The California State University (CSU) system would focus on instruction in the liberal arts and sciences, leading to bachelor's and master's degrees. The University of California (UC) system would be the state's public research system, offering bachelor's, master's, doctoral, and other professional degrees.

At the time, coordination among the segments of higher education was less complex. More than half of the job market focused on positions that required little formal education, such as agriculture and manufacturing, and there were pathways to professional positions for those without a degree.⁴

Less than 8 percent of the U.S. population held a bachelor's degree, and the population most likely to pursue postsecondary education was white and male.⁵

College was also more affordable. Government programs helped to cover both tuition and living costs, which made it easier for people of all ages to attend. For example, many people who enrolled in college were supported by the Servicemen's Readjustment Act (known as the GI Bill), which provided tuition assistance, living stipends, and medical care.⁶ For most of the 1960s, the community college, CSU, and UC systems did not charge tuition for in-state residents,⁷ and living costs such as housing were half of what they are today.⁸

Over the past 60 years, both the education and economic environment have changed. **Bachelor's degree attainment has increased dramatically: 37 percent of Californians have completed a 4-year degree.** In addition, the population attending college has changed. Women are more likely to go to college than men, and people of color

make up a larger share of the California college population, although gaps remain for Black, Latino, and Native American populations,⁹ as well as for rural, low-income, and English language learners and for people with disabilities.¹⁰

The increase in degree attainment reflects the evolving labor market, which has changed in two ways: There has been a significant increase in jobs that require bachelor's degrees, including professional and managerial positions, at the same time that there has been an increase in low-wage jobs that require little training, such as service workers.¹¹ While there are still well-paid jobs that require less training, they tend to be in fields, historically staffed by men, such as construction, automotive technicians, and truck driving.¹² Other middle class jobs that historically were options for those with a community college credential, such as nursing and computer support, now often require bachelor's degrees.¹³

The shift toward lower-paying opportunities has not been felt equally across the state. Job growth in regions such as the Inland Empire and Central Valley has focused more on low-wage opportunities like hospitality and transportation, or middle-wage jobs in areas such as education, health care, and construction. Urban regions such as the Bay Area, San Diego, and Orange County had stronger growth in high-wage jobs such as financial, information, and professional services.¹⁴

The dwindling number of well-paid jobs for those without a degree has fueled an economic divide that is aligned with educational attainment. **People with bachelor's degrees earn \$1.2 million more over their lifetimes compared to those whose highest level of education is a high school diploma.**¹⁵ Degree attainment is also associated with positive benefits ranging from health to civic engagement.¹⁶

However, **degrees alone do not promise job security**, and many people are questioning the value of a

college education.¹⁷ Without practical experience, recent college graduates may be less attractive to employers.¹⁸ Hiring is frequently informed by relationships. For students who have little work experience and lack access to social networks, their degree may not translate into a well-paid job when they graduate.¹⁹ Furthermore, people who take out loans and do not complete college may carry significant debt that they struggle to repay, which reduces the economic benefit of college.²⁰

In addition, postsecondary education is not a one-time investment. **Most workers hold 12 jobs over the course of their career.**²¹ Experienced workers often need additional education and workforce training to navigate shifts in the labor market or gain new skills required for their current jobs. Increasingly, people are working much later in their lives, which may result in significant career changes as they age.²² The imperative for additional training will intensify as artificial intelligence transforms the workplace. **By 2030, up to 30 percent of the hours that people spend working could be automated.** Jobs in fields that require little education, such as food service, manufacturing, office support, and customer service, may become fully automated, requiring workers to move to other industries. People in white collar jobs will require new skills to use artificial intelligence for tasks such as data analysis, content creation, and decision-making.²³

While economic factors are fueling participation in higher education, they also are a significant challenge for many Californians. In addition to having enrollment costs, such as tuition and fees, students need to pay for essentials like housing, childcare, transportation, food, and medical care. For those who are supporting families, it may be untenable to cover these costs, particularly if they must reduce their working hours.²⁴

California has made significant investments in keeping tuition low at public institutions by providing financial aid and waiving costs, such as through Promise Programs

that allow high school students to attend local community colleges for free.²⁵ However, financial aid and fee waiver programs are targeted toward young people and longer-term training options, which means that mid-career workers who are upskilling or training for a new job may not be eligible for support.²⁶ Many Californians are unaware of the public benefit options available to them and may find it too time-consuming and confusing to ensure they continue to receive all the benefits they could access.

As a result, learners often take out loans to finance their education, which can reduce their ability to buy a home or start a business, or they pursue nonacademic options for ongoing learning. Given that employers continue to emphasize degree attainment in hiring,²⁷ and 6.8 million working-aged Californians stopped their education after high school,²⁸ the current gaps in economic opportunity are likely to persist.

Increasing Opportunities for Learning

As economic conditions have changed, California has made significant investments in addressing the evolving needs of the state. These efforts reflect a national consensus that the historical divisions between high school, college, and career stand in the way of economic mobility. Experts and advocates have called for new opportunities whereby young people can explore career options in a hands-on manner, people of all ages have the chance to apply the skills they are learning in real-world contexts, people can earn academic and nonacademic credentials that are valued by employers, and learner choices are informed by a clear understanding of possible jobs and the training

necessary to secure those positions.²⁹ California has helped to lead the way in this movement.

For example, TK–12 schools have focused on ensuring that all students are prepared for success in college and have numerous mechanisms to help students to prepare for both college and career. Young people can take college courses while in high school (*known as “dual enrollment”*), enter career-focused programs in fields ranging from cybersecurity to early childhood education (*known as “career technical education”*), and enroll in blended college/career preparation opportunities (*such as “Linked Learning”*) that both teach practical skills and ensure that students are eligible for CSU or UC.

In 1950, California had 67 public colleges. It now has more than twice that number, including 116 community colleges, 23 CSU campuses, and 10 institutions in the UC system.³⁰ But as educators have responded to the demand for a more highly educated workforce, the boundaries between these systems have blurred. Community colleges offer courses in high schools and baccalaureate degrees, CSUs award professional doctorates, and UCs provide continuing education.

The state has also created new opportunities for those who do not take a traditional route to a degree. Apprenticeships and service-learning opportunities allow people to be paid as they acquire skills. Colleges are also helping adults return to school so they can access jobs that pay better salaries. For example, colleges can grant academic credit for skills learned in other contexts such as the military or workforce training programs (*known as “credit for prior learning”*) so experienced workers can more rapidly complete certificate and degree programs that are required to advance in their careers. Several community colleges offer certificates and associate degrees using a model (*known as “competency-based education”*) that focuses on demonstrating mastery of

learning rather than completing specific classes within a defined timeframe.

California has also worked to expand other options for adult workers, youth who are engaged in neither school nor work, and older learners. Adult education programs, which are provided by both TK–12 districts and community colleges, help adults in a number of ways, including allowing learners to earn high school equivalencies such as the general equivalency diploma (GED); supporting people to build foundational literacy and numeracy skills; providing those seeking to upskill with technical education and job preparation; offering dedicated programs for adults with disabilities; and helping immigrants master English and become U.S. citizens who can support greater economic opportunity and family stability. In recent years, federal funding and accountability measures for adult education programs have emphasized the importance of transitioning participants into college pathways. As a result, programs have increased their focus on college-preparatory skills and created stackable credentials that align with other college programs.

In addition, California has created numerous funding streams that aim to address discrete workforce needs. For example, the state supports workforce training programs that are tailored to specific circumstances, such as

- encouraging high school students to prepare for apprenticeships;
- incentivizing local educational agencies to develop and offer career technical education programs that prepare students to meet local workforce needs;
- retraining workers who have lost their jobs;
- offering funds to employers seeking to upgrade the skills of their employees;
- developing industry-specific efforts to fill in-demand positions in sectors like health care and climate; and

- providing opportunities and support for people with disabilities.

These programs are delivered by many different state and local entities, including the Labor and Workforce Development Agency, the Department of Health Care Access and Information, the Department of Rehabilitation, the Department of Education, the California Community College Chancellor's Office, the Air Resources Board, and regional consortia across the state.

In recognition of the financial challenges experienced by learners, California has invested heavily in financial aid, including Cal Grants, the Middle Class Scholarship, and the California Dream Act. The state also provides specialized support programs for specific populations, such as

- the Chafee Grant for foster youth;³¹
- the Vocational Rehabilitation program for people with disabilities;³²
- the Rising Scholars program for people who are incarcerated;³³
- the Zero-Textbook-Cost Degree Grant Program, which develops program materials that can be provided to community college students for free;³⁴ and
- the expansions to Cal Grants to support parenting students.

State funds are augmented by federal programs, including need-based financial aid (*Pell grants*), food aid (*CalFresh*), and medical care (*Medi-Cal*); support for low-income families (*CalWORKS*), and services such as housing, childcare, and legal aid (*Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act*).

This array of education, workforce training, and support options could form a rich tapestry. While the state has taken steps to build cohesion across agencies and regions of the state, work remains to make it seamless

and easy for people to understand their options, enroll in the right type of program, and secure the financial support necessary to participate. In addition to the burden placed on learners and their families, there are numerous challenges that educators face. Because funding comes from so many different sources, efforts may be duplicated by different providers and the burden is placed on educators to piece together the resources necessary to provide opportunities to all learners. Despite the hard work of people across multiple systems to help Californians attain their dreams, the reality is that equity gaps continue in educational attainment, income, accumulated wealth, health, and civic engagement.

Building Stronger Systems and Improving Coordination

In response to the increasing complexity in educational options, California has sought to improve coordination across education providers.

For example, the California legislature has hosted a series of hearings, and numerous reports have been published about ways to refine the Master Plan for Higher Education each decade since the plan was adopted.³⁵ In 2002, the Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education released a report that documented a 3-year effort to identify ways to adapt the original plan, including the need to expand it to address pre-K and adult education.³⁶ In 2010, the Legislative Analyst Office produced the *Master Plan at 50* report, which highlighted specific adaptations needed to address the regional role of CSU.³⁷ In 2017, Assemblymember Marc

Berman convened a Select Committee on the Master Plan for Higher Education, which has addressed topics such as the transfer process.³⁸

In addition, in 1973, the Joint Committee on Higher Education created the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC), which was responsible for the planning and coordination across community colleges, CSU, UC, and independent colleges.³⁹ CPEC served as a high-level regulatory body that fulfilled roles such as assessing the need for new campuses, evaluating college eligibility requirements, reviewing proposals for new degree programs, administering federal programs, and advocating for budget requests. CPEC also brought together data on students to clarify their longer-term outcomes such as whether they transitioned from high school into college or transferred from community college to 4-year institutions. **However, because the state lacked clear goals for higher education, CPEC struggled to broker agreements on topics that required collaboration.** Furthermore, although CPEC's board included public representatives, its recommendations were understood to be strongly influenced by postsecondary representatives rather than providing objective analyses. The tension between oversight and coordination contributed to its dissolution in 2011.⁴⁰

In 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom established the Governor's Council for Postsecondary Education.

The council created a space for dialog among education providers and was expanded beyond the CPEC's postsecondary focus to include representatives from the California Department of Education, the California Chamber of Commerce, the California Labor Federation, and the Department of Finance, as well as a business advisor. The council provided an opportunity for agencies to work together to tackle challenges that had been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the misalignment of educational pathways and economic opportunity, and the equity gaps in educational

attainment and well-paid employment. For example, the council established nonbinding priorities for joint actions such as through its report *Recovery With Equity: A Roadmap for Higher Education After the Pandemic*.⁴¹

In the fall of 2023, Governor Newsom expanded the council's focus beyond postsecondary education, renaming it the Governor's Council for Career Education and expanding its membership to include the Labor and Workforce Development Agency, California Federation of Teachers, and California Volunteers. This shift recognizes the many pathways Californians take to secure well-paid and fulfilling work, and the importance of improving coordination to create more equitable outcomes.

California has also made much-needed investments that are supporting greater coherence. Governor Newsom worked with the legislature to provide billions of dollars in targeted areas such as dual enrollment and apprenticeship, as well as regional efforts to build stronger career pathways into strategic California industries.

For example, the Regional K–16 Education Collaboratives provided an investment of \$250 million to help California's economy recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, while addressing long-standing social and economic inequities in higher education and workforce participation. Collaboratives are made up of TK–12 school districts, employers, and community college, CSU, and UC campuses. Together, these regional steering committees are designing degree and credential programs that incorporate hands-on learning in specific industries. This initiative also builds upon \$398 million in ongoing funding for the Strong Workforce Program, which aligns regional labor partners with TK–12 and community college institutions to develop pathways that prepare students for high-wage employment in industries that meet regional labor market needs.

In addition, in 2021 California Jobs First Regional Investment Initiative (*formerly known as the Community*

Economic Resilience Fund) provided \$450 million for investments in 13 regions to create quality jobs and bolster their resilience to climate and global challenges. California Jobs First, through its nine-member council of agencies within state government, leverages federal, state, and private funds, and invests in projects that advance each region's priorities and align with the Jobs First state economic plan and its emphasis on tradeable anchor sectors.

For the TK–12 education system, in 2022, the state invested \$500 million in the Golden State Pathways Program to provide local educational agencies with resources to plan and implement pathways in high-wage, high-skill fields so that students can transition from TK–12 to postsecondary education and into the workforce seamlessly to meet economic needs.

In the wake of the pandemic, Governor Newsom negotiated higher education compacts with CSU and UC, and a roadmap with the community college system to address shared priorities such as expanding enrollment, improving affordability, reducing gaps in student outcomes, building high-demand career pipelines, and strengthening intersegmental coordination.⁴²

Furthermore, panels of experts have identified specific actions that would accelerate coordination, such as ways to enhance career-specific training (*California State Plan for Career Technical Education*⁴³) and how to streamline the recognition of courses across community college, CSU, and UC (*Associate Degree for Transfer Intersegmental Implementation Committee*⁴⁴).

One common theme across these investments and recommendations is the need to shift the burden of understanding and navigating complex systems away from individuals. Most Californians cannot cover the cost of education and workforce training out of pocket and need financial support to participate. Few people have access to information on evolving career

paths and the complexities of competencies and skill alignment that employers are looking for. Those without an expert guide are unlikely to figure out the significant variation in rules governing eligibility for public benefit programs or acceptance of college transfer credits.

Developing the Master Plan for Career Education

If changes are not made to underlying structures, gaps in participation will persist,

particularly for populations that have not had strong access to these systems, such as English language learners, young people who are neither working nor in school (“*opportunity youth*”), and people with disabilities.

Therefore in August 2023, Governor Newsom called on state agencies and institutions of higher education to develop a plan to address these structural challenges by creating a Master Plan for Career Education, which was outlined in the Freedom to Succeed Executive Order.⁴⁵

As a first step in developing the Master Plan for Career Education, both the agencies and the broader public submitted written comments that described priority concepts that should be addressed in the plan, which were supplemented by more than 30 interviews with a variety of interest holders.

The Governor’s Office distilled four core concepts from this input: state and regional coordination, career pathways, hands-on learning, and access and affordability. The Governor’s Office shared these priority areas for action with the public and engaged in dozens of meetings to gather input from organizations

ranging from parents of students with disabilities to coalitions of high school educators.

In addition, during spring 2024, the Governor’s Office worked with local partners to convene eight design sessions in locations from the far north of California to the southern border, as well as two virtual convenings. More than 840 community members attended these events to generate strategies for the Master Plan for Career Education, including educators from TK–12, community colleges, and 4-year institutions; adult education and workforce training providers; students; community-based organizations; labor representatives; and employers.

INITIAL IDEAS

Initial input from the agencies named in the Freedom to Succeed Executive Order focused on four primary concepts: creating stronger coordination mechanisms, building skills-based pathways, expanding work-based learning, and increasing access to public benefits and career pathways.

You can read a summary of those ideas in the Master Plan for Career Education Core Concepts report, which was released in January 2024, at careereducation.gov.ca.gov/master-plan-engage.

There was a striking alignment between the topics prioritized by the Governor’s Office, state agencies, higher education, and members of the public. Participants in the design sessions encouraged coordinated action to align education and workforce training providers, streamline funding and data systems, provide guidance to people of all ages on careers, strengthen connections with

employers to design hands-on learning opportunities, and address financial barriers to participation in education and workforce training.

For example, participants envisioned stronger state and regional coordination structures, including establishing dedicated entities to manage collaboration; providing resources for collaboration; creating sector-based regional plans that clarify roles for TK–12, community colleges, adult education, 4-year institutions, and workforce development organizations; and creating common measures to keep the focus on learner success.

Community members indicated that career pathways could be strengthened by integrating career education into coursework, including job-specific technical knowledge, 21st Century skills such as communication and problem-solving, and employment fundamentals such as financial literacy, resume writing, and interviewing techniques.

Participants described a vision in which employers are engaged to develop relevant coursework and to offer career exposure opportunities so that all levels of education reflect the skills needed in the workforce. In this vision, postsecondary institutions support people to get academic credit for skills they mastered in venues such as the military or on the job (*known as “credit for prior learning”*) using a standardized and simplified process. In addition, postsecondary agencies align transfer pathways, with more opportunities to transition from

shorter term career technical education certificates to degrees. Teachers in TK–12, career technical education, and postsecondary education are better compensated, including providing credit on the salary scale for industry training. Finally, funding is more sustained and consistent.

Participants suggested that hands-on and work-based learning would be improved by documenting who is participating in these activities and creating a statewide framework for employer engagement.

Learners at all stages of life should be alerted about work-based learning opportunities through an online resource hub and communications plan.

Finally, for increasing access and affordability, participants imagined that education and workforce training providers would help learners receive comprehensive support services that are integrated with more robust financial aid. To ensure parents, students, and adult learners know about these opportunities, financial

planning and literacy courses should describe options for college savings, financial aid, and public benefits.

COMMUNITY INPUT

Ten regional and online design sessions held during spring 2024 provided a space for community members and interest holders to share their perspectives and input about California’s Master Plan for Career Education. The Community Input and Considerations for the Master Plan for Career Education report highlights the collective insights and feedback gathered from these convenings.

You can read the report, which was released in July 2024, at careereducation.gov.ca.gov/master-plan-engage.



THE AGENCIES NAMED IN THE FREEDOM TO SUCCEED EXECUTIVE ORDER—IN TANDEM WITH THE COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND EXPERTS WHO INFORMED THE PLANNING PROCESS—ARE ALIGNED ON THE NEED FOR CALIFORNIA TO ADDRESS STRUCTURAL BARRIERS SO THAT EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE TRAINING WORKS FOR EVERYONE, ESPECIALLY POPULATIONS THAT HAVE HISTORICALLY NOT HAD STRONG ACCESS TO THESE SYSTEMS.*

Two primary themes emerged from the visioning process. First, the state needs to prioritize coordination. Given the changing nature of work and the economy, a dedicated forum is needed for education and training providers to develop career pathways in strategic sectors, whether reshaping program content or creating new offerings and strategies. Absent coordination, the state will struggle to respond to emerging challenges or rise to new opportunities, such as training people for green jobs that address the climate crisis, leveraging artificial intelligence to provide customized educational opportunities, or maximizing changes in federal guidelines to provide financial aid for short-term job training programs. With better mechanisms for collaboration, California will be able to pool its resources to deliver services more efficiently and comprehensively.

* Agencies named in the order: California Community Colleges, California Department of Education, California Labor and Workforce Development Agency, California State Board of Education, California State University, Department of Rehabilitation, Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development, and University of California.

Second, education and workforce training systems need to be redesigned so they can be accessed by many different types of learners, in recognition that people from a variety of circumstances will need to build their skills on multiple occasions over their lifetimes. The concept of universal design has been championed by the disability community, whose expertise helps ensure that everyday tools are designed so they are available for everyone rather than creating unique resources for specific populations. For example, smartphones come equipped with accessibility features that can be customized by the user, so that people with impaired vision can browse the web, a person who is hard of hearing can view a transcript of a podcast, or a person with a physical impairment can send an email. Not only does universal design ensure access to technology, it also has led to features that all people can appreciate, such as language assistants like Siri and Alexa. Currently, the process of accessing education, workforce training, and public benefits is so complex that many populations struggle to participate in them. If systems are redesigned to make them simpler to access, underrepresented groups will be more likely to thrive, resources can be redirected to provide targeted support for populations that have historically faced barriers, and it will be easier for all learners to gain the skills they need.

The following six primary areas of action provide specific examples of ways that California could foster collaboration and apply universal design principles. Each section lays out that shared vision, lists specific actions that could be taken, and highlights work that is already underway.

EARLY ACTIONS

During the development of the Master Plan for Career Education, representatives of state agencies and higher education convened several working groups and a task force to begin action planning and to implement demonstration projects. Appendix B describes examples of these activities.



1

“THERE ARE SO MANY UNALIGNED INITIATIVES AT THE STATE LEVEL. IT IS HARD TO CREATE SYNERGY WITH SO MANY VARIED EXPECTATIONS.”

PARTICIPANT AT A MASTER PLAN FOR CAREER EDUCATION REGIONAL CONVENING

Create a State Planning and Coordinating Body

The Freedom to Succeed Executive Order emphasized the importance of strengthening coordination to better align and integrate the historic education and workforce training investments and policies implemented during the Newsom Administration, as well as new efforts that will be initiated in the future.

Community members highlighted several factors that must be addressed to strengthen coordination, which aligned with input from agencies and higher education.

- **Variation in requirements:** Californians pursue learning through a broad range of opportunities, including TK–12 and postsecondary education; workforce training provided by workforce boards, adult schools, and apprenticeships; and programs focused on specific populations like English language learners, people with disabilities, and incarcerated populations. These education and training programs are resourced through numerous agencies, base funding streams, and specialized grant programs. While these programs may have similar goals, they often require separate plans, applications, and implementation components.
- **Scale of funding:** Many funding mechanisms help underrepresented populations access and complete education and workforce training (*such as programs for foster youth, people who have been incarcerated, or adults who have left the labor force*), but often these programs are funded by smaller-scale categorical allocations or are short-term in nature, which means that services are delivered as pilot programs that are difficult to sustain and scale. Requiring local providers to braid funding also disadvantages lower income and rural settings, which often have fewer resources for grant writing and planning.

- **Lack of information on education and workforce training outcomes:** Data are not readily available on the outcomes of education and workforce training interventions, either overall or disaggregated for specific populations, to help education and workforce training providers understand whether their efforts are achieving their goals for equitable economic mobility.
- **Lack of information on economic opportunity:** Attentiveness to shifts in labor markets related to local jobs and future employer needs plays an important role in supporting students' economic mobility and regions' economic growth. However, currently available information is often presented in a manner that is difficult to use, and various entities produce analyses that differ from each other. As a result, education and training providers do not have a clear understanding of whether their individual programs are collectively enrolling and graduating enough people in various sectors.
- **Lack of communication:** Currently there is not a dedicated, neutral space where education and workforce training providers can jointly discuss the impact of potential changes to policy and practice, such as their graduation or entrance requirements.

Creating a dedicated, staffed entity through which state agencies and institutions of higher education can work together will also **enable California to more effectively tackle joint challenges** such as better serving adult learners or people with disabilities as they transition between academic and workforce training programs.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Governor Gavin Newsom, working with the Legislature, should create a new statewide planning and coordinating body that brings together the state's education segments, workforce training providers, and employers. The coordinating body should evaluate changing economic needs and demand for skills, develop sector-based and cross-sector strategies, create statewide goals, align federal and state plans, coordinate efforts to maximize funding, coordinate implementation of specific federal and state programs, codesign programs to address workforce opportunities, and connect with regions.

- By offering shared tools and resources, state agencies and institutions of higher education can provide seamless transitions for learners as they move across service providers. For example, they can work together to provide eTranscript California as the state's postsecondary transcript platform, align college and career advising information, and use information from the Cradle-to-Career Data System (C2C) to inform their decisions.
- With improved labor market information, state agencies and institutions of higher education can align programs with in-demand skills; ensure that the state is graduating enough people with high-demand skills; support career navigation through student advising that uses common definitions across systems; and leverage the strategic sectors highlighted in the California Jobs First Economic Blueprint.
- Through reviewing economic changes and demands for new skills, the statewide planning and coordinating body should discuss and strategize implications for TK–12 and higher education curricula.

ACTION UNDERWAY: BUILDING A SHARED DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

When the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) was dissolved, the state faced a dilemma—it no longer had the ability to link information on student progression from TK–12 to college, or to see the outcomes of community college students who transferred to CSU or UC. A decade later, California created C2C to restore that functionality and expand it to address the state’s need for more comprehensive insights.⁴⁶ Governed by a board made up of data providers, legislative representatives, and public members, C2C has successfully and securely combined information on participation in TK–12, public and nonprofit higher education, financial aid, public benefits programs, teacher credentialing, and employment. The data system is now being expanded to include information on apprenticeship and other workforce training programs and to strengthen information about how participation in education and workforce training programs impacts jobs and earnings. **Unlike CPEC, C2C exists to provide insights to a wide range of interest holders.** It was designed to ensure access in ways that support different types of users, such as making information on priority topics available to policymakers and advocates through public dashboards and query tools, allowing researchers to conduct detailed analyses through a data request process, and supporting students and their families to plan for college and career. If a state coordinating body is created, C2C could provide it with neutral information that would support data-informed decisions.



ACTION UNDERWAY: SIMPLIFYING THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

In the Freedom to Succeed Executive Order, the Governor emphasized the importance of building on existing tools to share academic transcripts and transmit information on skills that could support competency-based learning and skills-based hiring.

In conjunction with this idea, C2C convened a task force during 2024 that contemplated ways to document skills learned both in and outside of the classroom and that developed a set of recommended actions.

Currently, the process of sending transcripts between different campuses and higher education segments can be confusing and expensive for students. For example, during the planning process, many community members described how high school students who take college courses (*“dual enrollment”*) do not know they have to send a separate transcript to get credit for these courses once they enroll in CSU or UC. Community members imagined **a streamlined process in which less time is spent verifying transcript data and more resources are focused on helping students develop an academic and career plan and access the services they need** such as financial aid and public benefits.

Many community colleges, CSUs, and UCs share community college transcripts through eTranscript California—a state-funded service provided by the California Community College Chancellor’s Office—but some do not take advantage of this resource. Adopting eTranscript California as the state’s universal postsecondary transcript platform would allow coursework to be transmitted in a standardized way to both public and nonprofit colleges.

This uniform data source could also be linked to college application forms to share information on prior coursework including dual enrollment courses taken by high school students or transferable courses when community college students apply to CSU or UC, and send transcripts once a student is accepted. Finally, eTranscript California could be connected to advising tools to help students better understand their eligibility for freshman or transfer admission and receive personalized guidance, such as information on potential majors based on classes they have already taken.

Based on the recommendations of the task force, the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office is working on rebuilding eTranscript California, informed by experts from TK–12, community college, CSU, UC, and nonprofit colleges, with **the goal of reducing the burden placed on students when applying to college and making eTranscript California universally available to California’s students.**

ACTION UNDERWAY:

PROVIDING USEFUL LABOR MARKET INFORMATION

The Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research (COE) is a network of technical assistance providers funded by the community college system. Their primary purpose is to provide data to inform the development and revision of community college programs, as well as to support regional planning and building college capacity to use labor market information. However, they have also generated information to support efforts such as California Jobs First Regional Investment Initiative, to inform efforts to grow jobs in the state's strategic sectors.

COE staff combine information from public and proprietary sources, paired with information gleaned from local employers, to create easy-to-read reports that are tailored to college needs. COE also provides insights that can help with pathway development. For example, several regions have created reports that clarify which jobs were resilient during prior recessions and the COVID-19 pandemic, provide positive working conditions, and are unlikely to be automated. These reports can be used to prioritize which programs to grow and how to direct funds toward shared goals such as strengthening pathways from workforce training programs and adult education to community colleges, supporting high school students to explore high-demand fields, and working with employers to expand work-based learning opportunities in strategic sectors. This model could be expanded upon to provide labor market information to state and regional planning bodies and to other state agencies and institutions of higher education.⁴⁷

ACTION UNDERWAY:

JOINT PLANNING FOR NEW JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The increase in federal funding for infrastructure projects has created opportunities for California to create thousands of jobs, but employers will need trained workers to fill those positions. Therefore, the Governor's Office is leading a review of how to reach the state's infrastructure project goals while also supporting employment and training opportunities, especially for populations that historically have had fewer opportunities. This effort will identify how agencies can effectively implement workforce dollars for infrastructure and climate-related projects and provide toolkits that offer strategies and potential partners for training and career pathways in a range of jobs including construction, operators, and technicians. The project will also identify how California can more effectively track jobs data across agencies and funding streams so that it has real-time information on infrastructure-related job creation and demographic information about people in those jobs. Regardless of each agency's projects and administrative structures, this process will support the state to align common priorities for good jobs, training, and career pathways for all.

2

“WE NEED TO ALIGN ALL SYSTEMS TO WORK TOGETHER SO IT IS EASIER TO COLLABORATE AS PRACTITIONERS AND ASSIST STUDENTS AS THEY NAVIGATE TRANSITIONS.”

PARTICIPANT AT A MASTER PLAN FOR CAREER EDUCATION REGIONAL CONVENING

Strengthen Regional Coordination

Given the size and diversity of California, work often needs to be coordinated at the regional level. However, due to the various funding streams that are intended to improve education and career pathways, the state has developed many different regional entities. While the funding mechanisms may be different, the entities that participate in these regional efforts are often the same. For example:

- **High Road Training Partnerships** bring together employers, community colleges, labor and workforce training providers to fund regional industry-centered strategies that increase access to quality in-demand jobs.
- **TK-12, community colleges, CSU, and UC** coordinate multiple funding sources that support stronger journeys from high school career technical education into postsecondary education and the workforce, including the Local Control Funding Formula high school grade span adjustment for career technical education, the Career Technical Education Incentive Grants, K-12 Strong Workforce Program, and the Golden State Pathways Program.
- **The California Adult Education Program** brings together community colleges and adult schools to develop regional plans to coordinate delivery of high school equivalency, English language, and workforce training programs.
- **California Regional K-16 Education Collaboratives Grant Program** brings together TK-12, community colleges, CSU, UC, and employers to improve pathways in health care, education, business management, and engineering or computing.
- **California Jobs First** collaboratives bring together workforce, community, labor, business, government, economic development, education, and philanthropy to grow the economy in California's strategic sectors.

While the large number of regional efforts can be complex, feedback from agencies, higher education, and community members during the planning process **highlighted the value of existing regional partnerships**. Agencies and community members emphasized the ways in which regional collaboratives are supporting work-based learning opportunities, facilitating employer input on program and curriculum development, and generating useful labor market information. **With better coordination across regional efforts, California could have a stronger impact while reducing duplication of efforts.**

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The Governor's Office should evaluate how successful regional coordination models can be expanded to create sustainable forums in which educators, workforce training providers, and employers work together with a clear division of responsibilities across partners.

- The first step in determining how best to leverage existing regional structures for more comprehensive coordination is to assess regional assets and challenges related to regional collaboration. By documenting processes for shared decision-making, this information could support action planning to strengthen collaborative processes and structures in each region in partnership with regional interest holders.
- When aligning regional coordinating efforts, regional coordinating bodies can place greater emphasis on strengthening employer engagement by, for example, identifying critical skills for the workplace and expanding opportunities for work-based learning, with a focus on building social capital and creating earn-and-learn opportunities such as paid internships and apprenticeships.
- Regions should develop mechanisms that coordinate funding for similar programs so educators can secure funding by submitting fewer proposals, track a consistent set of outcomes, and sustain resources over longer periods of time.

ACTION UNDERWAY:

SHARING INFORMATION TO SUPPORT TAILORED ADVISING

The Sacramento Regional K–16 Education Collaborative is building education pathways in sectors such as health care, computer science, and engineering. This effort focuses on learners at many different stages of life, from high school students who are taking college courses (*"dual enrollment"*) to community college students who are seeking to transfer and earn a bachelor's degree to adults who started but did not complete their educational objectives. To support stronger communication between TK–12 and college partners, members of the collaborative have agreed to share information about their students, including course-taking histories and their contact information.

This individual-level data will help institutions provide more targeted outreach, identify reasons for missed enrollment, and support advising on academic opportunities. Information will be made available to educators through dashboards, as well as to researchers to conduct studies, and will complement information that is being compiled in the C2C analytical data set.⁴⁸ The data-sharing agreement will provide a strong foundation for regional efforts to support career pathways in other strategic sectors, while ensuring educators can provide the types of supports that are appropriate to different learners.

ACTION UNDERWAY:

ESTABLISHING SECTOR COORDINATORS

California Jobs First aligns state and regional efforts to accelerate job creation and innovation, with a focus on increasing access to good-paying jobs in strategic sectors such as life sciences, clean economy, and high-tech.

Each region has been provided funding to hire sector investment coordinators in their priority industry sectors, who are tasked with promoting systems change and alignment activities. For example, coordinators can help catalog projects already underway, support regions to identify and apply for grants, and serve as liaisons with partners such as community-based organizations and economic development entities. The Labor and Workforce Development Agency and the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz), which together oversee California Jobs First, will ensure that coordinators who are supporting the same strategic sectors in different regions work together. Creating this infrastructure will allow regions to be more efficient in engaging partners and securing new resources that will accelerate joint efforts.

In early 2025 the California Jobs First Council, made up of nine Cabinet-level agencies, will release a statewide economic blueprint that will help guide investments in strategic sectors, paired with funding to support job creation. The council will develop detailed skills maps for strategic sectors. As the state identifies the best way to harmonize work at the regional level and expand employer engagement, the sector investment coordinators will serve as resources to further those goals.

ACTION UNDERWAY:

COORDINATING PROGRAMS AND FUNDING

Orange County (OC) Pathways is a regional entity that brings together TK-12, community college, and employers to improve career learning. It helps to coordinate work such as setting shared goals and aligning funding sources. Over the past decade, the partnership has awarded over \$63 million by braiding together state and federal funds to advance high-quality programs. In addition, OC Pathways provides technical assistance to help education partners connect with employers to provide hands-on learning opportunities, better utilize data, and design pathways.

One way that OC Pathways has helped advance the field is by pioneering youth apprenticeship. Young people aged 16–24 participate in a registered apprenticeship program where they gain hands-on experience in fields such as advanced manufacturing, information technology, and health care. The programs are designed to use a competency-based approach, pairing classroom time with on-the-job experience. They also support students by offering mentors, advisory services, and financial assistance. Students get paid while they learn, earn an industry-recognized credential, and build contacts within employers. The OC Pathways approach to youth apprenticeship has proved so successful that it is now being replicated across the state.⁴⁹

3

"CALIFORNIA NEEDS TO DEVELOP A STATEWIDE LEARNING AND EDUCATION RECORD TO SUPPORT COMMON STANDARDS, ASSESSMENTS, AND DIGITAL BADGING."

PARTICIPANT AT A MASTER PLAN FOR CAREER EDUCATION REGIONAL CONVENING

Support Skills-Based Hiring Through a Career Passport

A key theme of the planning process from the community, agencies, and higher education was **the need to expand opportunities for people to secure stable, well-paid work.** For example, community members noted that when people complete nonacademic workforce training programs, particularly in adult education, they struggle to find high-quality jobs that pay livable wages. They indicated this was a function of the types of jobs that are available to people without degrees. They imagined a scenario in which employers shift the emphasis of hiring away from requiring degrees as the primary qualification for jobs and consider the skills people gain in nonacademic contexts.

Over the past few years, there has been a growing movement to adopt hiring practices referred to as "skills-based hiring" or "skills-first hiring." **Currently, as many as 90 percent of large companies use some form of automated applicant tracking system to screen resumes, filtering out about half of all applications.**

More than 60 percent of employers rejected otherwise qualified candidates simply because they did not have a bachelor's degree.⁵⁰

Employers can expand their talent pool by identifying, recruiting, hiring, and advancing candidates based on the alignment between job requirements and a candidate's skills, rather than using degree attainment as a primary screening mechanism.⁵¹

While many employers are interested in evaluating both academic credentials and skills earned outside the classroom, very few employers are adopting this approach.⁵²

One barrier is lack of access to validated information that will help them evaluate candidates based on their skills. Therefore, several other states have created electronic tools that allow people to share both their academic records and their skills with employers. Some states have also worked to develop skills frameworks that allow workers to understand how knowledge gained both inside and outside of the classroom can inform job opportunities.⁵³

California can help employers hire people with the skills they need by creating a Career Passport—a mechanism that provides proof of academic records from a trusted third party and validation that individuals have mastered relevant competencies. For example, an employer might prioritize an individual who earned the State Seal of Biliteracy in high school, mastered advanced problem-solving skills as evidenced by a military service record, and received an industry credential in cybersecurity. However, given that the process by which employers evaluate potential employees varies based on industries, shifts to hiring practices must be tailored to existing human resources frameworks.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

State agencies and institutions of higher education should make it easier for employers to make hiring decisions based on individuals' skills in addition to their academic credentials.

- To ensure that Career Passport provides information in a manner that will fit into hiring practices for specific sectors, the Office of Cradle-to-Career Data can lead a planning process that includes educators, workforce training professionals, and employers.
- As a way to build stronger pathways to state service jobs, the Career Passport can be used by the California Department of Human Resources (CalHR) to assess how apprenticeship, language skills, and service learning inform eligibility for jobs.
- Building on the California Jobs First Economic Blueprint, the state can identify additional sectors that could help inform the development of the Career Passport.
- By having a skills framework that is validated by both academics and employers, California employers can accelerate skills-based hiring practices and colleges can recognize skills and competencies for educational credit.

ACTION UNDERWAY: REDUCING THE EMPHASIS ON BACHELOR'S DEGREES IN STATE HIRING

Over the past few years, there has been a growing movement in the United States to revise hiring practices by focusing on the skills that potential employees have. More recently, employers are adopting a "skills-first" approach in which both degrees and skills inform hiring decisions. CalHR is helping to lead California's efforts to revise hiring practices by reviewing job descriptions for state service positions. As of 2024, unnecessary degree requirements have been removed from 173 entry-level positions. CalHR has joined a multistate effort to identify effective practices for using skills-first hiring approaches for public sector jobs, which will result in a set of recommendations by June 2025. These recommendations could inform the development of a Career Passport for state service.

4

**“YOU TAUGHT ME
HOW TO WALK,
AND TO RUN,
AND TO CLIMB,
AND THEN YOU
THREW ME IN
A POOL.”**

STUDENT PARTICIPANT AT A MASTER
PLAN FOR CAREER EDUCATION
REGIONAL CONVENING

Develop Career Pathways for High School and College Students

Young people are often presented with a false dichotomy: **Either choose to go to college or follow a separate pathway to prepare for a career.** When imagining a solution to this challenge, agencies, higher education, and community members identified similar strategies for improving students' educational journeys. **All students, beginning at the start of high school, should be encouraged to discover and explore well-compensated, lasting careers—including those that do and do not require college degrees—and should be guided to pathways to those careers.** Learning should incorporate opportunities to apply concepts to real-world contexts. Lessons should be taught in an age-appropriate manner and address common stereotypes about education and career pathways. Employers should codesign classroom activities and work-based learning to better align the concepts taught in school and skills that are valued in the workplace. Pathways should be

designed so students can pursue different opportunities over time, to gain a better understanding of their interests and aptitudes without jeopardizing their ability to pursue other college or career options they may choose subsequently. Whenever possible, high school students should have the opportunity to take college courses (“*dual enrollment*”) to accelerate their journey to jobs and higher education.

Students who elect to go to college after high school should be provided with ongoing opportunities to apply what they are learning to real-world challenges so they can continue to explore their interests. In all programs of study, students should be alerted to ways their growing body of knowledge is valued in the workplace and provided with opportunities to build the connections that will help them secure jobs in their desired field. Postsecondary institutions could leverage labor market information to provide guidance and identify existing resources that can help connect

students with job-related opportunities. For example, postsecondary institutions can develop paid service-learning opportunities in fields such as state service. Colleges can also help students understand how the skills they have already learned in entry-level jobs relate to longer-term career pathways. By focusing on the skills that students have built (“*competency-based models*”), **postsecondary institutions can help both students and employers understand the knowledge they can contribute at work and in their communities.** CSU and UC can also leverage their extension programs, first to provide career-focused content to students while they are pursuing a bachelor’s degree and then to offer ongoing training opportunities after they have entered the workforce.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

While some students have access to career pathway opportunities, access is not the norm for all students. Pushing for universal availability and implementation of pathways programs would provide students from all backgrounds with clear roadmaps to gainful employment and career advancement. These pathways can be designed to provide experiential learning opportunities, shorten the time to a career, alleviate financial pressures, and empower individuals to actualize their dreams, all while contributing to social and economic mobility within communities.

- TK–12 and postsecondary agencies should **establish career pathways** that align with current and future statewide and regional workforce needs. These pathways can begin in high school and extend through postsecondary education and workforce training.
- Pathways should have **built-in opportunities** for high school students to take college courses (“*dual enrollment*”) that allow them to earn industry-recognized credentials and complete courses that count toward associate and bachelor’s degrees.
- High schools and colleges should provide students with opportunities to **engage in work-based learning**, including internships, service learning, pre-apprenticeships, and apprenticeships.
- Educators should **ensure that all students are able to explore their passions and career opportunities**, including groups that have had less access to higher education, such as people with disabilities, people of color, and English language learners.
- TK–12 schools and colleges should **provide support systems**, such as advisory structures, that ensure that students are attached to caring professionals responsible for their guidance and welfare.
- TK–12 schools and colleges should **adopt competency-based methods** of documenting mastery of knowledge and skills.

ACTION UNDERWAY: BUILDING STACKABLE CREDENTIALS

Linked Learning is an approach that pairs technical education with college preparatory materials for high school students, **with an emphasis on hands-on learning.** Long Beach Unified School District was an early adopter of this approach. **Since it first implemented Linked Learning in 2009, the district has developed 38 programs of study that are grounded in industries such as public services; environmental resources; and arts, media, and entertainment.** In addition to having opportunities to meet with employers, create project portfolios, and participate in internships, students complete entrance requirements for CSU and UC.

The district has also worked to embed opportunities for students to earn college credit. For example, students may be encouraged to build their information technology skills by taking courses in hardware fundamentals and information technology applications at Long Beach City College so they can complete a Computer Hardware Technician certificate before they graduate from high school. This credential both opens opportunities for employment and accelerates progress toward degrees in computer security and networking.

In other parts of the state, such as Hemet Unified School District in the Inland Empire, schools adopting Linked Learning approaches are developing pre-apprenticeship programs in carpentry, welding, automotive, cybersecurity, viticulture, and water technology. **Pre-apprenticeship programs are affiliated with a registered apprenticeship and help students prepare to succeed in paid learning opportunities,** including teaching technical skills, providing support services, and building connections to both employers and community college partners.⁵⁴

ACTION UNDERWAY: USING STUDENT INPUT TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES

Career-connected schools are emerging as a model for improving economic mobility for young people. For example, the tribal government of Blue Lake Rancheria has established the Modern Youth Internship Academy. **By linking together Tribal, school district, community college, and business resources, the program will reach 6,000 high school students in Humboldt and Del Norte Counties.** Students receive internships, coaching, mentoring, leadership opportunities, college preparation, and career readiness that help them prepare for in-demand jobs in areas including advanced manufacturing, health care, education, management, entrepreneurship, agriculture, and forestry. **The Tribal Education Agency has a strong record of leveraging student-led projects to advance community priorities.** For example, young people have helped launch efforts related to energy efficiency, community water systems, emergency power designs, and biodiesel manufacturing.⁵⁵

ACTION UNDERWAY:

HEALTH CARE PARTNERSHIPS

Compton College, supported by the Los Angeles K–16 Regional Education Collaborative, is organizing community partners to **strengthen pathways to health care careers**. Health care jobs are in demand in Compton and they provide an opportunity to improve outcomes for the community, which suffers from very high rates of obesity, diabetes, cancer, sexually transmitted diseases, and asthma. Educational attainment in the region is low, and more than half of the population lives well below the poverty level. Therefore, the local school district, community college, CSU, and medical graduate school signed a compact with health care providers to strengthen community health pathways. Middle and high school students will be alerted to job opportunities and how those careers make a difference in their community. A dedicated program manager will help align training options and create more seamless transitions as students move from high school to college and graduate school. Area employers will ensure there are sufficient opportunities for learners to complete the clinical training that is required to secure health care credentials. The initiative also includes a strong focus on social justice. It emphasizes helping people stay in Compton once they have finished training for a career, and it provides community education on disease prevention and healthy living.⁵⁶



ACTION UNDERWAY: STRENGTHENING THE TEACHER WORKFORCE

California is facing a significant teacher shortage driven by factors including the aging workforce, steep attrition rates fueled by poor teaching conditions, low enrollment in teacher training programs, and the high cost of living relative to teacher salaries.⁵⁷ The state needs to develop stronger pathways into teaching jobs, improve compensation and working conditions, and recruit learners to participate in these opportunities. Therefore, a broad coalition of agencies representing TK–12, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, the California Student Aid Commission, and state and nonprofit higher education agencies **created the State Educator Workforce Collaborative to jointly identify and address strategies that can ensure every learner in California is served by a highly qualified teacher, using an evidence-based approach that leverages the power of interagency collaboration.**

In the first cycle of work, the collaborative focused on **improving access and affordability of high-quality preparation programs** and developed a suite of resources for prospective teachers and educator preparation programs. The resources are designed to answer questions such as “What preparation pathway is best for me?” and “How do I pay for teacher training?”⁵⁸ The next cycle of the collaborative’s work will focus on establishing shared statewide measurable goals for the teacher workforce and recommending statewide roles and strategic collaboration systems to achieve these

goals. This cycle will aim to formalize the collaborative as a sustainable mechanism for state-level strategic teacher workforce planning. The model being adopted by the collaborative could be replicated in other disciplines to support stronger high school and college pathways for jobs in California’s strategic sectors.

In addition, a second effort involving many interest holders is **designing a roadmap for teacher apprenticeships.** Under this new model, **people who are training to be teachers work in schools and receive a progressive wage while they complete their bachelor’s degrees and teacher preparation requirements, with their tuition either waived or reduced.** Teacher apprenticeship programs that have been piloted in other states have strong outcomes, including retention rates of 90 percent. The program is an especially effective strategy for diversifying the profession and supporting career advancement for people who already work in education, such as teacher’s aides, office workers, janitors, and lunchroom staff. Currently California offers more than a dozen registered teaching apprenticeships, mostly in early childhood education. The roadmap will help to expand opportunities for other teaching positions.⁵⁹

ACTION UNDERWAY: ADOPTING COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACHES

More than a hundred years ago, the U.S. education system adopted a framework for education that is based on seat time. Pathways to high school and college completion are based on the “Carnegie unit.” For example, a single high school credit assumes 120 hours of study, parceled out in 1-hour sessions offered 5 days a week. **However, as education evolves to meet the needs of learners over the full span of their lives, many are calling for a shift so that academic success is based on mastering skills**—an approach known as “competency-based education.”⁶⁰

In California, both high schools and colleges are experimenting with competency-based models. For example, Lindsay Unified School District in the Central Valley helped improve outcomes for its students who are largely Latino and low income and include a significant number of migrant students and English language learners. Rather than following the factory model organized by age-graded classrooms using standardized pacing guides and emphasizing standardized tests, the district organizes and regularly re-organizes students by the standards and skills they need to learn. Students can demonstrate their mastery of content through projects and specific tasks. Students set their own pace for learning content while educators provide appropriate supports as they track where students excel and where they are still struggling.

The impact of this approach has been significant. **When this competency-based system was adopted prior to the pandemic, overall proficiency on state assessments nearly doubled, including advancing from the 33rd to the 87th percentile in English language arts.**⁶¹ Now other districts, including Placer Union High School District in the Sierra Nevada region, are working to replicate the model.⁶²

Community college students are also getting to experience competency-based models through a suite of demonstration projects that are offering certificates and degrees in culinary arts, management, biotechnology, kinesiology, and automotive technology. For example, at Shasta College in Redding, **rather than taking 20 semester-long courses to earn an associate degree in early childhood education, students can opt to take 60 different skills-based exams.** The program provides materials so that learners can master content at their own pace, with the support of teachers and counselors.⁶³ The lessons learned from the community college demonstration projects can inform the development of additional competency-based programs over time.

5

“PEOPLE HAVE TROUBLE IDENTIFYING THE STARTING POINT FOR CAREER TRANSITIONS.”

PARTICIPANT AT A MASTER PLAN FOR CAREER EDUCATION REGIONAL CONVENING

Strengthen Workforce Training for Young People and Adults

There are many reasons why people need education and workforce training in contexts beyond conventional high school-to-college trajectories. For example, young people may elect to go directly into the workforce and identify new career aspirations over time. Or, as the nature of work evolves—including new skills required to keep a job or preparation necessary for newly created occupations—**many more experienced workers will need to engage in ongoing learning.** The changing employment picture also means that people will need guidance on what their career options are, how particular jobs relate to their interests and skills, and how best to prepare for those opportunities.⁶⁴

Information on job and learning options is particularly critical for opportunity youth. These young people are particularly hard to reach because they are no longer connected to systems that can provide them with support, whether for basic needs or for building the necessary

skills that will allow them to secure stable employment. The number of opportunity youth has increased nearly 20 percent since the COVID-19 pandemic **and they now constitute one in eight 16- to 24-year-old Californians.** Opportunity youth are a diverse group who often face multiple, intersecting challenges such as a history in the foster care system, being an English language learner, supporting their own children, or having a disability. They are also more likely to live in poverty, receive public assistance, and lack fundamentals like health insurance, computers, smartphones, and internet access.⁶⁵

Given the constellation of job training programs that have been developed, it is challenging for opportunity youth and adults to know how to obtain the information and skills they need. Rather than put the burden on individuals to navigate these systems, community members and representatives of agencies and higher education suggested that California could create regional service

delivery networks of federally funded job centers, community colleges, adult schools, libraries, county jails, state prisons, and community-based organizations. These entities could jointly develop career advising tools that provide information on potential careers, where to get appropriate training based on existing skills and life goals, and how to access financial aid and public benefits to cover the cost of training. With such tools and shared capacity, education and workforce training systems could focus their efforts on providing information that is appropriate to a specific stage of an individual's journey, while ensuring that the underlying information is consistent and removing duplication of effort.

In addition to providing information, these regional service delivery networks could **build and replicate programs that will help opportunity youth and adults advance in their careers, with a focus on long-term career advancement strategies.** Such programs can serve as a focal point for collaboration by bringing together the public sector, community-based organizations, and employers to identify and teach in-demand skills, provide wraparound supports, and build social networks. By designing programs that simultaneously help people immediately secure stable jobs that provide greater economic security while ensuring that learners understand future opportunities, California can address income and wealth gaps.⁶⁶

One way to ensure that learners can advance along career ladders to jobs that require college certificates and degrees is to **adopt competency-based approaches to education, including creating well-defined processes to provide academic credit for skills gained outside the classroom.** Skills that can be translated for academic credit commonly include training received in the military, workplace training, professional certifications, credit by exam, and

community-based experiences such as civic activities and volunteer service. The practice of "*credit for prior learning*" focuses on aligning skills to the learning outcomes of specific courses offered at a college, establishing equivalent learning.

When colleges recognize competencies that learners already have, they save students time and money because learners do not have to take classes that teach concepts they already know. **Receiving credit for prior learning can help shorten an individual's time to a degree and save them money on tuition and living costs, thereby reducing their economic burden.** For example, receiving 15 units of credit for prior learning **yields over \$34,000 in savings per student.** Adult learners who receive credit for prior learning complete programs of study at almost twice the rate of other students (49% versus 27%). Completion rates are even higher for those who earn credit for prior learning, including Black, Latino, and low-income students who earn credit for prior learning.⁶⁷

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

For adults who need additional training and for opportunity youth, education and workforce development agencies should ensure access to education, workforce training, and jobs that allow them to advance in stable, well-paying career pathways.

- A service delivery network of job centers, community colleges, adult schools, extension centers, libraries, county jails, state prisons, and community-based organizations can create an affordable “no wrong door” approach to education and workforce training opportunities.
- By strengthening coordination, state agencies and institutions of higher education can deliver joint programs focused on specific populations, such as people with disabilities, English language learners, students in families with mixed-citizenship status, and people involved with the justice system.
- Sector-based pathways that are aligned with worker and opportunity youth needs, use cohorts to encourage social connections, include work-based learning, and provide earn-and-learn opportunities can improve coordination between workforce training programs and community colleges.
- By strengthening coordinated faculty-led processes for reviewing skills, colleges can accelerate adoption of credit for prior learning to recognize skills, knowledge, and abilities gained outside of the classroom.

ACTION UNDERWAY:

SERVICE DELIVERY NETWORKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

When educators and community-based organizations work together, **they can expand their impact in the community and improve college access and success for a variety of learners.** For example, Los Angeles Trade-Technical College (LATTC) and the Coalition for Responsible Community Development (CRCD) have been partnering for a decade to ensure that young people have access to training for good jobs. CRCD, working from the LATTC campus, **provides a case-management approach that ensures students can get support on topics ranging from housing to mental health services.**

The partners have developed several programs that further customize support for different populations of young people. For example, Project Tipping Point offers a 2-year, cohort-based academic program for foster youth to train for careers such as automotive technology, welding, and diesel mechanics, or to prepare for transferring to a 4-year college. LATTC works with CRCD and the YouthBuild Charter School of California to host the CRCD Academy, an alternative high school that provides opportunities for project-based learning and college coursework in construction. The Vernon-Central YouthSource Center—a partnership that also includes the Los Angeles Conservation Corps and the All Peoples Community Center—connects young people to education, leadership, community service, and employment opportunities. Together, these programs are helping expand access for young people who might otherwise have fewer opportunities for college and well-paid careers.⁶⁸

ACTION UNDERWAY:

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES TRAINING FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) are a critical component of community health systems and include paramedics who work with fire departments and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) who staff ambulances. In 2012, Alameda County launched an effort to engage more young people in the field by creating EMS Corps, focusing on foster youth and people who have been involved with the juvenile justice system. **Over the course of the 5-month program, learners master technical skills, receive life coaching, are supported to apply for jobs, and earn a stipend to support living costs.** By harnessing their experience with adversity, EMS Corps is helping to create new opportunities for young people who are primarily Black and Latino—a notable shift for the EMS workforce, which is primarily White.

In the first eight years of EMS Corps, **more than 500 young people participated, with a 95 percent job placement rate.** Many students were inspired to continue their studies and have become nurses, doctors, and firefighters. EMS Corps is now being replicated in 11 cities and counties, with additional features such as helping students complete high school diplomas and preparing students for firefighting exams.⁶⁹ This model could be adapted for other types of learners whose life experiences provide insights that could improve service delivery.

ACTION UNDERWAY:

HEALTH CARE TRAINING FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

In 2022, California launched a program that develops health care pathways for English language learners in adult education programs. The Workforce for a Healthy California English Language Learners program is a partnership between TK–12, community college, labor, and health and human services agencies and leverages regional adult education consortia. It offers accelerated learning models, such as ones that pair English language and technical skills. **As a result, immigrants and refugees at any level of English proficiency are able to obtain training and career advising necessary to enter and succeed in health care jobs.** For example, in San Diego, participants can become certified nursing assistants, personal care assistants, home health aides, behavioral health aids, health unit coordinators, or ophthalmic technicians. **The programs ensure that participants graduate with both noncredit credentials and the industry licenses necessary for employment.**⁷⁰ This model could be replicated for other strategic sectors to expand opportunities for English language learners.

ACTION UNDERWAY: CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING

Credit for prior learning is a practice used by community colleges to provide academic credit for college-level skills that were gained outside of the classroom. For example, people can master health care techniques while serving in the military, learn competencies needed to be an industrial mechanic in an apprenticeship, or gain fire management skills while serving in the California Conservation Corps.

However, there is no uniform practice for how prior experiences are evaluated, which means that learners must navigate unique processes at each institution they attend and may not be able to apply those credits if they transfer to a different college. To reduce this burden on individuals, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office is establishing a common data system to document how prior learning is accepted for academic credit and facilitating discussions among community college and 4-year college faculty to create agreements about how those credits should be recognized across the state. In addition, the community colleges have set a goal of providing 250,000 Californians with credit for prior learning and ensuring this results in students saving money, increasing their sense of belonging and well-being, improving completion of college credentials, and enhancing career opportunities.⁷¹





“FOR 95 PERCENT OF PEOPLE YOU NEED AN ‘EARN WHILE YOU LEARN’ STRUCTURE TO NOT BE BURIED WITH DEBT FOR THE TRAINING.”

PARTICIPANT AT A MASTER PLAN FOR CAREER EDUCATION REGIONAL CONVENING

Increase Access to and Affordability of Education and Workforce Training

Agencies, higher education, and community members noted that in both education and workforce training programs, learners have insufficient access to support services that provide transportation, childcare, elder care, housing, and food security. This insufficient access challenges their participation in both shorter-term and longer-term pathways.

Although California provides resources such as financial aid and public benefits, the systems providing these resources are often difficult to navigate, with each service requiring its own application and establishing unique eligibility requirements. As a result, people may not access programs that could provide the necessary resources for them to participate in education and workforce training, particularly people with disabilities, opportunity youth, students whose parents did not attend college (*“first-generation students”*), and English language learners.⁷²

In an attempt to solve this problem, the state has developed numerous programs that provide skilled navigators who help specific populations understand how to complete applications and provide required information for accessing and maintaining public benefits. However, this

approach is constrained by the number of people who can serve as navigators and by lack of awareness about these types of support.⁷³

Rather than putting the burden on individuals to figure out confusing systems, **California could address common sticking points by simplifying the process for accessing these resources using a universal design approach.** For example, education and workforce training programs could develop joint strategies for building awareness of and access to public benefit programs, such as by

- **engaging parents and legal guardians** to understand college savings opportunities;
- **teaching teenagers** how they can access financial aid and public benefits to make postsecondary opportunities affordable;
- **ensuring that college students who receive financial aid** are supported to receive other forms of public assistance; and
- **providing information** on financial aid and public benefit options as an integral part of advising in the workforce training system.

State agencies and institutions of higher education can also reduce costs for all students by waiving fees. For example, **the community college system requires all colleges to adopt policies that prioritize free textbooks and instructional materials, which can save students \$1,100 each year.**⁷⁴ The community college system has also made state dollars available to cover the cost of industry-valued certification and licensing exams in fields such as mechanical design and information technology.

As noted throughout this document, when systems are better designed, **educators and workforce training providers can better devote attention to providing customized support for populations that have historically had less access to opportunity**, in a way that recognizes the unique assets and challenges of these populations.

State agencies and institutions of higher education can also work together to streamline processes related to eligibility for public benefits. These actions can be implemented internally, such as by sharing information between agencies to remove the reporting burden from individuals, educators, and workforce training providers.⁷⁵

In addition to providing wraparound supports, California can also expand opportunities for people to be paid as they are learning. For example, **Governor Gavin Newsom set the ambitious goal of serving 500,000 apprenticeships by 2029**, and state agencies are working together with the community colleges to expand opportunities from traditional apprenticeship fields such as construction to other in-demand jobs in information technology, community health, and early care and education.⁷⁶ Agencies and community members have also encouraged the expansion of other earn-and-learn strategies such as paid apprenticeships, work-study, and service learning.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

State agencies and institutions of higher education should ensure that eligible learners from all backgrounds and parts of the state can easily access education, workforce training, and public benefits that open doors to more rewarding, well-paying jobs.

- **By addressing barriers** that have historically made access to education and workforce training out of reach for some populations, state agencies and institutions of higher education can increase access and success for learners such as people with disabilities, opportunity youth, students whose parents did not attend college (“first-generation students”), and English language learners. They can also ensure that educators and workforce training providers have the skills to support those populations’ specific needs.
- **By improving awareness** of and access to public benefits, state agencies and institutions of higher education can support non-tuition costs for eligible students.
- **Streamlining the eligibility process** for public benefits and leveraging federal workforce dollars can support adult learners to pay for college courses.
- **By working collaboratively with employers**, education and workforce training providers can improve universal access to earn-and-learn opportunities, such as apprenticeships, paid internships, and service learning.

ACTION UNDERWAY:

IMPROVING ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Over the last several years, TK–12 schools and colleges have been expanding services for people with disabilities through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.⁷⁷ As more disabled young people prepare for college, additional supports can help to smooth their transition and integration into postsecondary institutions. For example, Fresno State University created Wayfinders, a 2-year independent living certificate program for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Participants live in student apartments, gain work experience through internships, enroll in college coursework, and are welcomed into the campus community. **The impact of building independence and job skills is significant—two-thirds of graduates live on their own, three-quarters are working, more than half are continuing their education, and nearly all report they are satisfied with their social life.**⁷⁸

Redwood Supported Education to Elevate Diversity (SEEDS) Scholars Program at UC Davis offers similar **opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities through a 4-year non-degree program.** Internships include dedicated coaching on job skills, navigating transportation, communication skills, and leadership. In addition, UC Davis ensures that college personnel have been trained in inclusive practices and universal design.⁷⁹ These approaches could be replicated for other communities to ensure that colleges provide welcoming environments for a variety of learners.

ACTION UNDERWAY:

EXPANDING COLLEGE ACCESS FOR ADULTS WITHOUT HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMAS

Ability to Benefit is a federal program that allows people without a high school diploma to secure federal financial aid to take college courses. However, new federal rules significantly restrict the conditions under which adult learners can receive financial aid. For example, students would need to pay for several classes out of pocket or pass an exam before they could qualify for aid. **Under these new rules, roughly 4 million Californians would lose access to federal aid opportunities.** When

the California Community College Chancellor's Office learned that pathways to training were being reduced for adult learners, **the office successfully petitioned the federal government to ensure Californians without a high school diploma can continue to qualify for federal financial aid.** Students without high school diplomas who seek federal financial aid will also get other benefits, such as access to counseling, tutoring, and accessibility services.⁸⁰

ACTION UNDERWAY: ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY AT POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Funded by the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the CalFresh program is overseen by the Department of Social Services and provides low-income people the ability to buy foods at many markets and stores. **However, only a fraction of California students living in poverty apply for and receive CalFresh benefits.**⁸¹ Therefore, community colleges, CSU, and UC have **prioritized efforts to help address food insecurity.**

All CSUs have dedicated outreach programs to help students with the CalFresh application process. To support this implementation, the CSU Chico Center for Healthy Communities helps other campuses secure federal funding for outreach.⁸² UC has pioneered similar efforts. For example, UC Berkeley devotes a team of student and full-time staff to help students enroll

in CalFresh. An easy-to-use website allows students to determine if they are eligible and then either set an appointment to get expert support or apply for aid on their own.⁸³ Coordination efforts could be expanded for other types of public benefits, including helping students understand how eligibility requirements vary across different programs.

In addition, in some regions, community colleges, CSUs, and county agencies are **working together to expand access to food aid.** For example, in San Bernardino, postsecondary institutions will give students the option to share information from their federal financial aid applications with the local CalFresh provider to determine if they qualify for support. Researchers will document whether access to this support has a positive impact on college outcomes.⁸⁴

ACTION UNDERWAY: REDUCING THE COST OF COLLEGE FOR ADULTS

To help adults build the skills they need to secure better jobs, federally funded job centers provide individual training accounts. These funds may be used at any organization that meets specific criteria, including providing industry-recognized credentials and having high rates of employment and earnings gains after participating in the program. Most community college programs meet these requirements. However, the process for reporting this information can be challenging, especially when it requires validation of employment outcomes. The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office and the Labor and Workforce

Development Agency are partnering to make this process easier. Leveraging data-sharing agreements that allow the community colleges to match student records with the state wage file, the Labor and Workforce Development Agency is exploring ways they can report these figures to the federal government on behalf of the colleges. Instead of devoting considerable time to data collection, this state-level effort would allow colleges to focus their energy on alerting adult learners to the opportunity to receive funding to cover tuition, fees, and supplies.

ACTION UNDERWAY: PAID OPPORTUNITIES FOR SERVICE LEARNING

The Office of Governor Newsom launched the #CaliforniansForAll service initiative in 2020. The effort braids federal and state funds to **provide paid opportunities to build public service workforce skills in areas such as TK–12 education, climate action, and food insecurity.** For example, College Corps provides undergraduates with a stipend of \$10,000 to work with community-based organizations. The Youth Service Corps focuses on low-income, former foster, justice-involved, and unemployed young people and helps them get a solid foundation in the workforce. Participants are guaranteed minimum wage work while receiving wraparound services such as case management, job training, and resume writing. The California Climate Action Corps provides people who have associate degrees with opportunities to work with Tribal communities, public agencies, and educational institutions while receiving a living allowance, earning industry-recognized certifications, and accessing benefits such as health insurance, childcare, and food aid. Participants in all California service corps programs also benefit from an alumni network that provides career-advancing opportunities such as networking and speaking opportunities. As postsecondary institutions seek to create more paid, hands-on learning opportunities, they can build on lessons learned from the state's service-learning programs.

ACTION UNDERWAY: EXPANDING APPRENTICESHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

In support of the state's ambitious goal to serve 500,000 apprentices by 2029, and as directed in state law,⁸⁵ the Division of Apprenticeship Standards convened the California Youth Apprenticeship Committee to **develop strategies for expanding earn-and-learn opportunities for young people.** For example, the committee developed specifications for a Career Apprenticeship Bridge program that **allows high school students to begin apprenticeships as part of a career technical education program.** This structure would ensure that young people participate in programs that meet quality standards, including providing students with **opportunities for a minimum number of hours of paid on-the-job training and earning college credit,** ensuring that they can complete their apprenticeship after they graduate from high school and enroll in community college, and providing support to complete related degrees and transfer opportunities. This model would help people begin earning competitive wages early in their career while providing opportunities for many potential educational and career pathways.⁸⁶



THE MASTER PLAN FOR CAREER EDUCATION IS INTENDED TO BE A LIVING DOCUMENT, RECOGNIZING THE CONSTANTLY SHIFTING NEEDS OF CALIFORNIA.

By setting a direction for increased collaboration and a universal design approach to learning, it creates a space for continued dialogue between state agencies, higher education, employers, and communities about how to respond to rapid changes in the economy so that California can ensure greater opportunity for all.

Looking forward, concerted efforts must be made to enhance statewide and regional coordination, develop career pathways that begin at the high school level and extend through postsecondary and work-based options, create opportunities for people to access education and workforce training over their lifetime, increase the access and affordability of education and workforce training, and support employers to hire people based on their skills rather than their degrees.

The actions taken at the state level can help create the right environment for expanded opportunity, but policy changes will be insufficient. Educators, workforce training entities, public benefit providers, community-based organizations, and employers will need to work together to translate these frameworks into changes in daily practices, relationships, and resource flows at the local and regional levels. **This document, along with the rich perspectives found in the *Community Input and Considerations Report*, can serve as a blueprint for the work ahead.**

Appendix A:

Glossary of Terms

- **21st Century skills:** knowledge, life skills, career skills, habits, and traits that are critically important to success in school and at work, such as critical thinking, collaboration, and communication. 21st century skills are also known as “soft skills” or “durable skills.”
- **Apprenticeships:** programs that combine paid on-the-job training with classroom instruction to prepare workers for highly skilled careers. Registered apprenticeships, unlike other work-based learning approaches such as internships, must be approved and validated by the U.S. Department of Labor or California’s Department of Apprenticeship Standards.
- **Basic needs:** essential resources required for learners to thrive, including safety, housing, food, transportation, mental and physical health care, childcare, and technology.
- **California Jobs First Economic Blueprint:** a strategy for creating good-paying jobs and regional economic development, focused on 10 key industry sectors in 13 economic regions, which aims to streamline the state’s economic, business, and workforce development programs.
- **Career technical education (CTE):** courses and programs that teach academic, technical, and occupational skills to prepare high school, adult school, and community college students for specific jobs. CTE is sometimes referred to as “career and technical education.”
- **Competency-based education:** academic programs that organize content based on what a student knows and can do rather than following a more traditional scheme, such as by course. Working at their own pace, students demonstrate mastery of specific concepts, such as TK–12 grade-level standards or key learning outcomes for a postsecondary program.
- **Credit for prior learning:** college credit that is awarded for validated knowledge and skills that a student has gained outside of a traditional classroom, such as through military service, apprenticeship, industry-recognized credentials, or work experience.
- **Dual enrollment:** opportunities for high school students to take college courses and earn college credit before they graduate from high school.
- **Earn-and-learn:** opportunities for individuals to gain new skills and knowledge while simultaneously earning a wage, typically through on-the-job training, apprenticeships, paid internships, or paid public service.
- **First-generation students:** The federal definition refers to college students whose parents did not complete a bachelor’s degree. In some cases, the term is used to indicate students whose parents did not attend either community college or a 4-year postsecondary institution.
- **Higher Education Compacts and Roadmap:** Agreements between the Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, the California Community College,⁸⁷ California State University,⁸⁸ and University of California⁸⁹ systems that prioritize advancement of student-focused, shared goals over a 5-year term. The agreements with CSU and UC are referred to as “compacts” and the agreement with the California community college system is called the “roadmap.”

- **Justice-involved people:** people who have been in contact with the justice system, either as a defendant or in some other way such as serving a sentence in jail or prison; awaiting sentencing or trial, on probation or parole; a victim, witness, or suspect in a crime; civilly committed to treatment; taking court-mandated classes; or a young person committed to the care of the Department of Youth Services.
- **Linked Learning:** an educational framework that combines academics with work-based learning to help students succeed in college, career, and life.
- **Opportunity youth:** individuals between the ages of 16 and 24 who are not in school or working, including youth and young adults involved with the foster care, juvenile justice, and homelessness systems of care. This population is sometimes referred to as “disconnected youth.”
- **Skills-first hiring:** hiring or promoting workers based on their skills, knowledge, and abilities, regardless of how or where workers got those skills. Employers typically take into account learning from a variety of contexts, such as academic attainment, industry-recognized credentials, apprenticeships, military service, and prior work. This concept is also referred to as “skills-based hiring.”
- **Stackable credentials:** a series of academic certificates and degrees that build on each other to help people advance in their careers. By offering a series of aligned, shorter-term certificates, colleges can offer incremental milestones on the path to completing longer-term credentials.
- **Strategic sectors:** a framework created by California Jobs First that identifies industries that have an established competitive position and strong projected growth or are essential to fueling innovation, as well as sectors that are critical to community functioning such as education, health care, and infrastructure.
- **Work-based learning:** a method of education whereby students gain practical skills and knowledge by working in a real-world workplace setting, typically through internships, job shadowing, or apprenticeships, allowing them to apply classroom learning to real-life work situations and develop valuable job-ready skills.
- **Wraparound supports:** services that are intended to address barriers to participating in education and workforce training, such as financial aid, housing, transportation, childcare, mental and physical health, and food insecurity.

Appendix B: Governor's Council for Career Education Demonstration Projects and Recommendations

In 2024, while planning for the Master Plan for Career Education was underway, the Governor's Council for Career Education convened several intersegmental working groups.[†] These groups included representation from TK–12, higher education, and business and labor, and they were tasked with tackling specific challenges that would likely be included in the Master Plan for Career Education. The purpose of these working groups was to strengthen how organizations and agencies work together, tackle topics that have impeded prior career education momentum, and pave the way for the implementation of the Master Plan.

These leaders worked together to review the priority barriers to progress, selecting a single topic to focus on, in line with the priorities in the Freedom to Succeed Executive Order and community input received as part of the Master Plan process. Over a series of months, the working groups collaborated to remove roadblocks, work with local leaders across their systems, and develop demonstration projects as a “proof of concept” of the priorities that the Master Plan for Career Education aims to bring to scale across the state.

Overviews of each of the working groups, including their priorities and demonstration projects, are detailed below.

DUAL ENROLLMENT

Dual enrollment offers significant promise for learners, families, and educators across the state by expanding college and career-readiness opportunities in high school. To benefit, individuals need to understand dual enrollment, its benefits and offerings, how to access it, and its transcript and transfer implications. If administrators, students, and families do not understand dual enrollment or cannot equitably access it, dual enrollment will remain an underused pathway to college mobility. To address common barriers, a working group was selected to focus on improving the accessibility and uptake of high-quality dual enrollment opportunities by developing two sets of resources: guidance for students and guardians on the benefits of and pathways to follow for dual enrollment, and a toolkit for TK–12 counselors and administrators which aggregates best practices to help them improve and scale dual enrollment programs.

[†]The Governor's Council for Career Education includes the leadership of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities, California Chamber of Commerce, California Community Colleges, California Department of Education, California Department of Finance, California Federation of Teachers, California Labor and Workforce Development Agency, California State Board of Education, California State University, California Volunteers, Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development, and University of California. The Master Plan for Career Education planning process also included California Health and Human Services, including the Department of Rehabilitation.

These resources are being piloted in Merced County, where TK–12 partners and community colleges are leading the charge to increase awareness of dual enrollment and to grow program enrollment. Over time, the learnings and resources from this effort will be shared across the state, to be adapted for relevance in local geographies.

Through this collaborative effort, leaders across the state are advancing the career education vision, defining mechanisms for regions to better coordinate dual enrollment and accelerating high school students' pathways to college and career.

CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING

Credit for prior learning supports degree completion, but across California there is limited uniformity in how prior experiences are accepted and approved by institutions. A working group sought to facilitate uptake of credit for prior learning to help students with prior experiences such as certifications and apprenticeships receive college credit. The working group decided to focus on information technology and cybersecurity, a high-growth job cluster with well-documented job competencies, as individuals can currently learn industry-recognized core competencies outside of the classroom.

For the Inland Empire and Southern Border, the working group mapped a list of certifications and apprenticeships to course credits within each community college and CSU campus and launched faculty working groups to guide the acceptance of credit for prior learning. Further, this working group partnered closely with the Mapping Articulated Pathways (MAP) initiative, the data system in which community colleges document the type of nonacademic learning they accept and the academic credit they grant for such learning. A partnership with MAP allowed the working group to institutionalize the process and ensure the faculty perspective remains at the forefront.

As exemplified by this effort, higher education leaders and faculty are working together to determine how systems can better collaborate to advance credit recognition and streamline the path between workforce training and higher education—doing so in a manner that is aligned with the state's career education vision.

CAREER NAVIGATION

The California Volunteers Corps-to-Career pilot in Los Angeles is improving the process for qualified service members to obtain public sector jobs. The program looks at customer service and applicant outreach practices, potential technology solutions, and policy changes to improve pathways into state service. A working group used learnings from Corps-to-Career to create a more generalized model for employment pathways, focused on public sector careers.

Further, as the working group was assessing the current state of career navigation, the group determined that there are many different types of career pathway resources that can help learners determine careers and jobs that may be available to them, but resources are often disjointed and introduced too late in the career navigation process. Accordingly, the working group sought to enhance career navigation processes by developing a set of recommendations focused on early employer engagement and better use of technology in career advising.

This demonstration project and set of recommendations assists in advancing career education by supporting the vision that job seekers and learners have clear career options and pathways.

STUDENT BASIC NEEDS SUPPORTS AND CALFRESH UPTAKE

Throughout California, many students struggle to access higher education or stay enrolled as they are unable to cover the costs of basic needs such as housing, food, medical care, childcare, and education. At the same time, student uptake of available benefits that can help cover such costs remains low. **As of 2019, only 30 percent of eligible CCC and UC students enrolled in CalFresh, the state's food benefits program.** Further, in 2021, **only 33 percent of students who were eligible for any type of basic needs assistance accessed that support.**⁹⁰

Experts and practitioners have pointed to the value in improving collaboration between campus basic needs centers and county welfare departments to improve CalFresh uptake. The working group developed a toolkit to establish and maintain partnerships between basic needs centers and county social service departments to improve student uptake of CalFresh. This toolkit is being launched in Alameda County and Humboldt County and will be added to existing resources on basic needs benefits. Over time, the toolkit will be shared more broadly with counties and campuses across the state.

Through this collaborative effort, leaders are partnering to move forward accessibility and affordability, ensuring that students have the non-tuition supports required to pursue a career education path.

ETRANSCRIPT CALIFORNIA

The Office of Cradle-to-Career Data convened representatives from the agencies in the Governor's Council for Career Education to design more streamlined ways of sharing academic records between institutions using the eTranscript California platform. Developed more than a decade ago to share information on community college course taking, eTranscript California is supported by public funds and administered by the California Community College Chancellor's Office. The task force developed detailed recommendations for how the platform could be updated to simplify college planning and applications for students, whether they take college courses while in high school (*dual enrollment*) or enroll in community college, CSU, or UC. Key recommendations included the following:

- **Produce a single transcript** that includes courses from all community colleges that students have attended (including dual enrollment courses).
- **Remove fees** so students can send their transcripts to CSU and UC for free.
- **Design eTranscript California** so it can share information on college course taking at CSU in addition to community colleges.
- **Embed eTranscript California** into the community college, CSU, and UC application forms so students can easily transmit their prior college courses.
- **Integrate eTranscript California** with student advising tools, including CSU Transfer Planner, the community college Program Pathways Mapper, and college eligibility tools provided to high school students by the California College Guidance Initiative (CCGI) on [CaliforniaColleges.edu](https://www.californiacolleges.edu).
- **Ensure high schools know** about all the college courses their students have taken through dual enrollment so they can provide better advising on post-graduation options.⁹¹

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