

Illuminating Innovations: Protecting Student Enrollment at California Community Colleges Amid a Pandemic

What Leaders Are Saying About This Report

“This report shines a light on the challenges that students continue to contend with in the pursuit of higher education, illuminating the troubling racial disparities in declining enrollment for our Black students in particular. The work of the colleges highlighted in this report focusing on equity and developing innovative solutions to retain and support students is commendable. However, this also illuminates the important work still ahead to ensure our students can access a college education, are provided with the support they need to remain enrolled, and have ample opportunities to enter the workforce after graduation. As the Chair of the California Legislative Black Caucus, I am energized to help address these challenges.”

California State Assemblywoman Lori D. Wilson (D-11)

“The Student Senate for California Community Colleges is deeply concerned about the enrollment decline and its far-reaching implications for potential students, college funding, and eventually the state’s economy. It’s disheartening to see the decline in enrollment among American Indian/Alaska Native students, Black students, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders even as colleges implement diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility plans. While this complex issue requires multifaceted solutions, we look forward to being a resource for state policymakers.”

President Clemaus Tervalon, Student Senate for California Community Colleges

“Without a doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately harmed Latino/as across the state. Within the California community college system, enrollment for Latino men dropped 21.9% and a 15.4% decline for Latina students. It is clear that our colleges must work harder to close equity gaps to support our most underrepresented students. Since our inception, the Alliance for a Better Community firmly believes that education is the foundation for a better future for all Angelenos. We have a collective responsibility to support our students and help them reach their academic goals during this difficult time. We look forward to working with our Los Angeles-area colleges to implement the best practices and recommendations in this report.”

Vanessa Aramayo, Executive Director, Alliance for a Better Community

“This timely report underscores the importance of swift and collective action to address the pandemic’s impact on individuals from historically marginalized communities. The strategies and activities the Campaign for College Opportunity lay out for us are a roadmap to build and enhance cross-sector partnerships and initiatives that serve the whole student, institutions, and communities. We look forward to leveraging recommendations in report through practice with our partners throughout Los Angeles.”

Alysia Bell, President, UNITE-LA

“This research is critical more now than ever because the pandemic has exacerbated students’ needs to balance and manage their school and life responsibilities and further shines a light on which students are being more severely impacted and how. This delicate balancing act is further complicated by the current economic conditions, impacting students’ perceptions and realities related to college affordability and how to navigate paying for college. Moreover, the Campaign’s recommendations highlight the need for institutions and the CCC system overall to redefine and reimagine what it means to be genuinely student-centered and focused, and the report provides practical and innovative examples of how colleges can meet students where they are and provide what students need to be successful.”

Darla Cooper, Executive Director, RP Group

“We know that the COVID-19 pandemic had an immense negative impact on all Californians, with a disproportionate impact on minoritized California community college students. As an organization committed to not only college access but also student success -- SoCal CAN looks forward to working with state policymakers and college leaders to move forward the powerful recommendations outlined in this report which will support and build community college enrollment, close racial equity gaps in student success, and reaffirm our state’s commitment to supporting all students in reaching their college goals.”

Alison de Lucca, Executive Director, Southern California College Attainment Network

“The challenges of the pandemic have opened a window of opportunity to recalibrate systems and practices to better serve students in the context of today’s postsecondary education and economic environment. We applaud this report for elevating the impactful innovations and solutions, especially those related to adapting to online instruction delivery, as well as improved collaboration among all education stakeholders, to drive an equitable and just recovery.”

Su Jin Gatlin Jez, Executive Director, California Competes

“This report not only shows the alarming state of enrollment for students of color, but reinforces the need for strong collaboration between K-12 school districts, local higher education institutions, and especially community college systems. It also shines a light on the important role diverse college students and educators can play in fostering the next generation of scholars, which has been a critical part of our success at Improve Your Tomorrow. Additionally, as an organization that leads the 1300 Campaign, a unique coalition of local K-12 and college institutions that aim to send more young men of color to their local colleges, we applaud the Campaign for College Opportunity for releasing a report that reinforces the need for these types of coalitions statewide. Institutional change that creates equity and college opportunities for all students cannot come to fruition in any other way.”

Michael Lynch, CEO and Co-founder of Improve Your Tomorrow (IYT)

“The Campaign’s report entitled: “Illuminating Innovations: Protecting Student Enrollment at California Community Colleges Amid a Pandemic” outlines the adverse student enrollment impacts created by the Covid-19 pandemic upon universities and community colleges in California and offers suggested changes to help turn around this loss in student enrollment. If California is going to continue as an education leader in the U.S. it is incumbent upon my fellow community college trustees and our CEO’s to respond to this issue in a proactive manner. We need to continue to identify new ways of providing our educational services to both return students to our colleges and to improve student success rates among all students. I look forward to discussing the proposed changes outlined in the report with my Board colleagues and our College President in order to better serve our students and communities we represent.”

William McGinnis, Trustee, Butte-Glenn Community College District

"The data is clear -- across the state, Black and Latinx men have seen declines in community college enrollment at rates significantly higher than their counterparts since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. To effectively recover from the pandemic, California’s higher education systems must come together to implement transformative best practices and policies that uplift Black and Brown men across the state. The Alliance for Boys and Men of Color looks forward to seeing these recommendations come to fruition and ensuring that state and college leaders protect and uplift boys and men of color in reaching their college dreams."

Eric Morrison-Smith, Executive Director, Alliance for Boys & Men of Color

“This report not only clearly outlines the negative impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on California’s community college students through compelling data, but it also uplifts evidence-based best practices and major opportunities to close racial equity gaps and remove systemic barriers in college access and success. As an organization dedicated to creating a more racially equitable education system, we are supportive of the recommendations outlined in this report to deepen the use of technology and disaggregated data to more intentionally support those students most impacted by the pandemic in reaching their college goals. The recommendations outlined in this report will be key to ensuring policymakers provide adequate resources, guidance, and support for California higher education systems.”

Dr. Christopher Nellum, Executive Director, The Education Trust—West

"This powerful report reinforces just how deeply the pandemic has changed college, the decision making that students go through to decide when, where and how to pursue a degree, and what colleges need to do to attract and retain students. I am deeply proud to live in a state where the community college system is placing students at the center and evolving to meet changing needs. Kudos to the powerful leaders highlighted throughout the report for focusing on equity in access and outcomes for Black, Latinx and other underrepresented student populations and demonstrating the courage and leadership needed at this juncture."

Jaclyn Piñero, Chief Executive Officer, uAspire

“The Mission Asset Fund is deeply committed to ensuring all Californians have the economic resources needed to build brighter futures for their families and communities. The COVID pandemic showed that students of color, particularly those in community colleges, have overwhelming financial barriers keeping them from realizing their educational goals. Because higher education is key to economic mobility and financial stability, California's leaders must commit to uplifting students, regardless of where they are in their academic journey. Providing real, timely, and direct financial support gives students a fighting chance to move forward with their educational goals and to recover from the devastating pandemic. We are encouraged by the recommendations outlined in this report and look forward to working for meaningful solutions to students' lives.”

José A. Quiñonez, Chief Executive Officer, Mission Asset Fund

California Community College graduates are a key piece to what makes the Bay Area a leading region in growing California's workforce and economy. In order to remain one of the most innovative, competitive, and inclusive regions in the world, the Bay Area Council recognizes the immediate need to support community college students in enrolling in, returning to, and succeeding at California community colleges as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. This is especially important as we consider the apprenticeship opportunities, streamlined four-year university pathways, and most importantly the immensely diverse and highly skilled workers our community colleges produce each year. The policy levers outlined in this report to improve technology, intentionally utilize data, and develop greater community partnerships will be key to our continued recovery from the pandemic.

Jim Wunderman, President and CEO, Bay Area Council

“The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated what we have known to long be true – inequities in college access and success have long existed for Black and Brown student across the nation. We must intentionally invest in the success of all California community college students, especially those who have historically been left out of our higher education systems. As a college that serves a great number of Black and Latinx students, I am humbled to know the work we do here at Cosumnes River College can be uplifted to guide colleges across the state in supporting their students in reaching their college goals. This report outlines exactly what is needed from our state and college leaders to ensure California continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic – actionable recommendations that will serve to increase student success and intersegmental coordination.”

Dr. Edward Bush, President, Cosumnes River College



The Campaign for

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