



WHAT'S NEXT:

A POLICY AGENDA FOR

EDUCATION EQUITY IN CALIFORNIA



The Education Trust–West

WHAT WE DO

We identify and analyze data related to the opportunity and achievement gaps separating students of color, low-income students, and English learners from other California students. We work to expose these gaps and their underlying causes. We translate complex education data into easily understood and actionable information for education advocates.

We work directly with leaders from schools, districts, and higher education institutions to understand and evaluate the effectiveness of reform strategies intended to reduce and eliminate achievement and opportunity gaps. We seek real-world examples of success supported by evidence at the campus, system, district, school, and classroom levels, and we explore ways in which success can be replicated at scale.

We seek to influence policy in California by engaging key education stakeholders, including policymakers, thought leaders, practitioners, faculty members, community groups, civic organizations, families, and youth. Our goal is to drive a state and national conversation about how our education system can better serve all students, from preschool through college.

MISSION

The Education Trust–West works for educational justice and the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, pre-K through college. We expose opportunity and achievement gaps that separate students of color and low-income students from other youth, and we identify and advocate for the strategies that will forever close those gaps.

INTRODUCTION

California is at an inflection point. In the years ahead, our new Governor and State Superintendent of Public Instruction, along with our legislature and other education leaders, will make critical decisions that affect students across our state. We need leaders who believe all of California's students deserve access to the American Dream – and who are willing to pair a clear vision for equity with an actionable plan to urgently close opportunity and achievement gaps so that every student receives a strong public education, pre-K through college.

We have much to celebrate in our state: high school graduation rates are steadily increasing, more students of color are entering our public colleges and universities, and the state continues to stand in steadfast support of undocumented and “DACAmended” students. However, at every level of our K-12 and higher education systems, equity gaps remain. For example, there isn't one California county where the majority of Latino students are meeting standards in English or math, a disconcerting disparity for a population that constitutes the majority of students in our public school system.

IN K-12 EDUCATION, recent reforms have aimed to make school district funding more equitable, improve stakeholder engagement in school district decisions, strengthen the rigor and relevance of standards and assessments, foster continuous improvement, and articulate a common vision and path for supporting California's 1.3 million English learners.

IN HIGHER EDUCATION, our state has passed laws intended to strengthen transfer pathways between our community colleges and four-year universities, it has begun to dismantle barriers that prevent students from swiftly entering credit-bearing college coursework, and has adopted a new student-centered community college funding model.

These efforts, when implemented equitably, can help close opportunity and achievement gaps. However, many of these initiatives still lack the resources, transparency, and accountability mechanisms necessary to ensure we move the needle for our most marginalized students and communities. In order to ultimately close gaps, we must focus on how to turn these policies into actions that make a difference for traditionally underserved students.

The policy recommendations in this agenda are intended to serve as a roadmap for how California's leaders can accelerate **change at a crucial time in California.** We recommend seven policy actions policymakers should take at both the K-12 and higher education levels. To ensure we prioritize the needs of students of color, low-income students, English learners, and other historically underserved student groups, state leaders should:

- 1. Strengthen accountability and offer meaningful support to struggling K-12 schools and districts**
- 2. Build a strong and diverse K-12 teacher workforce**
- 3. Address fiscal adequacy and ensure resource equity in K-12 schools and districts**
- 4. Offer every student a K-12 education that prepares them for college and career opportunities**
- 5. Broaden access and streamline transitions to and through postsecondary education**
- 6. Ensure college is affordable and provide a pathway for students to graduate without debt**
- 7. Foster and improve accountability and transparency in our institutions of higher education**

Those of us at Ed Trust–West have high hopes for California's future – in part because of the students in our classrooms and lecture halls today. Recently, more than 60 community advocates from across the state participated in the first Education Equity Advocacy Day in Sacramento. While policy decisions are often made far from the communities that are impacted by these choices, community members were able to share their truth with legislative staffers. Most inspiring was a college student leader named Kashmiere - she demanded to know: instead of schools and colleges constantly focusing on what students need to do differently to navigate those systems, when will these institutions focus on what they need to do differently to address student needs?

The coming years can bring the changes we need to support California's nearly 10 million students to realize their college and career dreams – if all of us in our great state are willing to do what it takes to get there.

K-12 EDUCATION

Over the past decade, California leaders have implemented a sweeping set of reforms aimed at improving quality and equity in our public schools.

A cohort of students has now progressed from kindergarten through their 8th grade year, learning our revised state math and language arts standards based on the Common Core.

The Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) are beginning to change science teaching and learning. Our new English Learner Roadmap recognizes linguistic diversity as an asset.

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) has made district funding more equitable, and in many communities, families and students have a greater voice in decisions made by their schools and districts.

Furthermore, with the California School Dashboard, educators, families, and other stakeholders are starting to look at school performance more holistically than before. These are all positive steps our state leaders should build upon.

At the same time, our students, educators, and local leaders face real challenges that must be addressed by our leaders in the years ahead. On national assessments, California's fourth graders rank 45th in math and 43rd in reading. Our state fares even worse for low-income students, and it is sliding backwards for Black students in both fourth and eighth-grade math, thus widening the achievement gap.

Our state leaders must address these issues of quality and equity head on. This means investing in meaningful accountability systems that direct serious attention and support to our schools and districts that are struggling most. It means strengthening our teacher workforce so that it is more stable and diverse than ever before. It means adequately funding our schools while ensuring that resources generated by students with the greatest needs are allocated equitably.

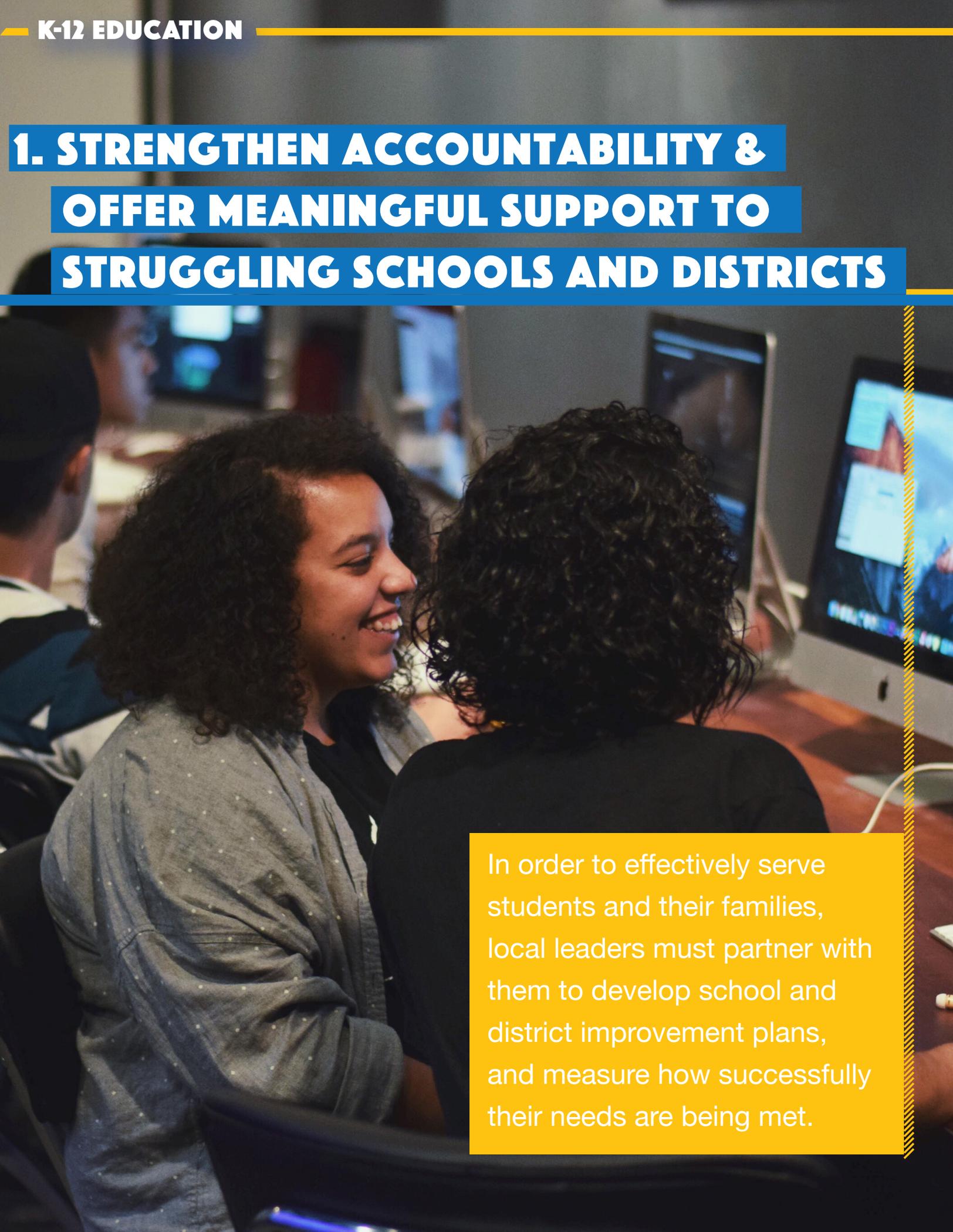
It also means expanding access to a broad and rich array of learning opportunities for all children, preschool through high school, so that no child's prospects for college, career, and life are limited by race, language, ability, or poverty.



**WE RECOMMEND THAT STATE LEADERS
FOCUS ON FOUR MAIN LEVERS FOR
STRENGTHENING QUALITY AND EQUITY
IN CALIFORNIA'S K-12 SCHOOLS:**

- 1. Strengthen accountability and offer meaningful support to struggling schools and districts**
- 2. Build a strong and diverse K-12 educator workforce**
- 3. Address fiscal adequacy and ensure resource equity**
- 4. Offer every student an education that prepares them for college and career opportunities**

1. STRENGTHEN ACCOUNTABILITY & OFFER MEANINGFUL SUPPORT TO STRUGGLING SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS



In order to effectively serve students and their families, local leaders must partner with them to develop school and district improvement plans, and measure how successfully their needs are being met.

In the last few years, California has adopted a new dashboard that measures school and district performance, established a framework for supporting districts, and crafted a new accountability plan in response to the Every Student Succeeds Act, the national civil rights education law. With the design and planning work mostly done, we now look ahead toward implementation.

HERE ARE THE PRIORITIES WE BELIEVE STATE LEADERS SHOULD FOCUS ON:

A. Make it easier for all stakeholders to find, understand, and use the California School Dashboard for school and district improvement.

The color-coded Dashboard offers families, community members, educators, and other stakeholders a view into how districts and schools are performing and improving across multiple measures and student groups. Unfortunately, it is also clunky and unintuitive. State leaders are already addressing this by redesigning the user interface. Even after this redesign, they should regularly gather input from multilingual and multiethnic parents and community members in order to learn how this website can evolve to meet their needs. Additionally, the state should centralize other data about schools into this one web tool. That data is currently scattered across multiple websites, like the School Accountability Report Card. The state could instead create a one-stop resource for families and the public to get school information.

B. Add a research-based growth measure to the Dashboard.

Our accountability system needs to measure the growth made by every student, no matter how high or low achieving. This will allow educators and families to celebrate the progress each student makes over the course of a year and will more accurately tell us which schools are making a positive difference.

C. Ensure alternative schools are accountable for student success.

Alternative schools serve students with very specific needs: youth who are credit deficient, struggling behaviorally, pregnant or parenting, or system-involved. Because alternative school students face a different set of circumstances than their peers, success in these schools must be tracked differently than in a traditional setting. Unfortunately, our measurement systems have not always reflected those differences, and we therefore encourage the State Board of Education (SBE) to continue the work it has begun to incorporate alternative schools into the Dashboard, develop alternative school-specific measures, and hold these schools and their districts accountable for student success.

D. Improve and integrate state data systems.

School districts collect and share vast quantities of data with the state, but the state does not always present this information effectively, and rarely does it use this data to help education leaders make decisions about how to design programs, adjust instruction, or allocate resources. The California Department of Education (CDE) should enable users to easily search for, disaggregate, and cross-tabulate data in order to answer key questions. For instance, it should be easy to see graduation rates for individual Asian/Pacific Islander/Filipino student

groups, or to learn how many Black boys are meeting reading and math standards as compared with Black girls or Latino boys.[†] In addition, the state should bring together data that are currently scattered across multiple agencies so Californians can see how students are progressing over time. As a technology powerhouse state, it is unacceptable that we do not know how many of our high school graduates progress to and through higher education — something 45 other states can already do.¹

E. Provide meaningful support to struggling schools and districts, and escalate interventions if they do not improve.

State leaders should tell the public, via the Dashboard, which districts have been identified for “differentiated assistance” — the extra support struggling districts are supposed to receive from their county office of education or another provider. State leaders should make it explicit that family and community representatives must be engaged in the improvement planning process, including the analysis of root causes of underperformance. The CDE and county offices should require that districts choose improvement strategies and interventions grounded in evidence or theory showing that they can work for their particular context. And, districts should be required to change their improvement strategies if they are misguided or simply not working.

The state has not yet identified individual schools that are struggling overall or for specific student groups, nor has it communicated how resources or support will be sent to these school sites. The state must do this, not just because it is required by federal law, but because there are many schools with significant needs, even in school districts that are, on average, doing well. The state has argued that districts are the best unit of change in education, but we know that the needs of individual school sites will get lost if we refuse to acknowledge their unique needs and challenges.

F. Engage students and families in school and district decision making.

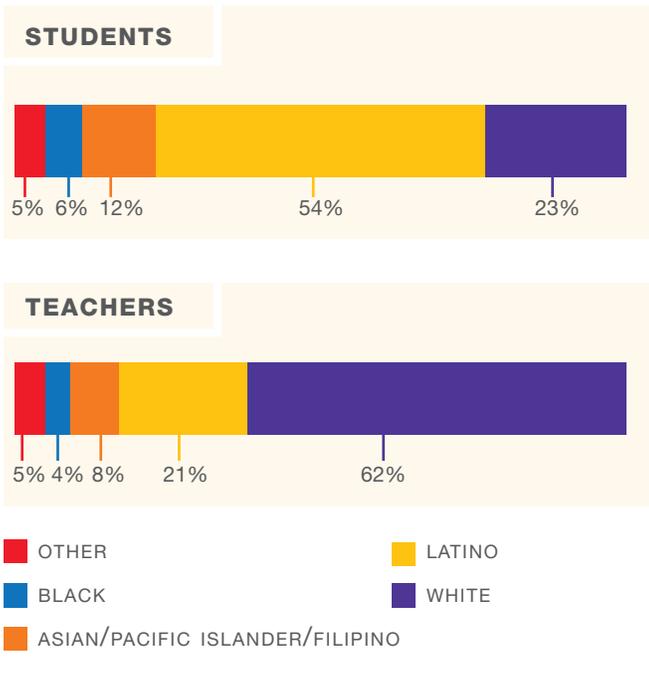
In order to effectively serve students and their families, local leaders must partner with them to develop school and district improvement plans and measure how successfully their needs are being met. State leaders should require districts to regularly survey students and parents and should make this data visible. They should also continue to build the capacity of districts and schools to foster constructive relationships with stakeholders to best leverage their input and perspectives in planning and budgeting, in identifying root causes of underperformance, and in identifying appropriate improvement strategies. The recent \$13 million state investment in the Community Engagement Initiative is a good start and should be closely monitored for impact.

[†] While California collects K-12 student outcome data for more than a dozen individual Asian/Pacific Islander student groups, the state combines that data into just 3 groups for public reporting.



2. BUILD A STRONG AND DIVERSE K-12 EDUCATOR WORKFORCE

Californian Teachers and Leaders Do Not Reflect the Demographics of Our Students



California is struggling to attract and retain teachers, especially bilingual, special education, Science, and Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) teachers, and in some rural areas.² Meanwhile, our teachers and leaders do not reflect the demographics of our students. While 54% of California’s students are Latino, 12% are Asian/Pacific Islander/Filipino, and 6% are Black, 62% of teachers are White, and only 21% are Latino, 8% are Asian/Pacific Islander/Filipino, and 4% are Black.

Teacher and leader diversity matters for a multitude of reasons. For example, when schools pair students of color with same-race teachers, outcomes improve across a host of measures, including achievement, attendance, and graduation.³ Further, students of all races benefit from teachers of color, who bring a diversity of perspectives and experiences into the classroom. Seeing diverse individuals in important roles, including teaching and leadership, ensures students are learning from a wider variety of role models.

The state should strengthen the teacher pipeline and workforce while also seeking to diversify the profession. It should have a comprehensive, well-documented strategy that grows the supply of teachers, provides for diverse preparation models and pathways, supports teachers to do their best work, and monitors equitable access to effective teachers.

THE STATE SHOULD COMMIT TO ALL OF THE FOLLOWING:

A. Continue to invest in high-quality teacher residencies and other “grow-your-own” models.

When designed well, these programs feature strong district-university partnerships, full-year apprenticeships with mentor teachers, and financial support in exchange for long-term teaching commitments. Residencies have the potential to increase teacher diversity and ensure that teacher supply is meeting demand in high-need schools and subjects, while also improving retention of new teachers and providing professional development opportunities for experienced mentor teachers. The state should continue to provide startup or incentive funding for these programs and uplift examples of successful models. In addition, districts should partner with CSUs and other institutions that serve higher concentrations of students of color to further increase the diversity of teacher candidates.

B. Create more pathways into the profession for potential candidates already dedicated to serving their communities.

Individuals like youth development workers — many of whom work in afterschool, summer school, and mentorship settings — are significantly more diverse than the existing teacher pool and already have experience working with young people. Districts and counties should develop more career ladders for these youth development professionals and also for paraprofessionals and other classified staff to become certificated classroom teachers, by developing grow-your-own models and clearly communicating about these opportunities. The state should also provide financial supports to these candidates, building from and extending existing efforts such as the Classified School Employee Teacher Credential Program.

C. Meet the growing demand for bilingual teachers.

The state and districts should identify existing and potential teachers who are already bilingual, help them earn their bilingual authorizations if needed, and support their move to bilingual classroom settings. California should incentivize institutions of higher education to create and expand bilingual credentialing programs and should also incentivize bilingual college students (especially those who earned the high school State Seal of Biliteracy) to enter teacher certification programs. Incentives may include fast-tracked programs, fee waivers, and other financial supports. The state, county offices, and districts should invest in multilingual instructional materials and professional development opportunities to support the success of both teachers and students in dual-immersion settings.

D. Reduce barriers to obtaining a teaching credential in order to broaden and diversify the profession.

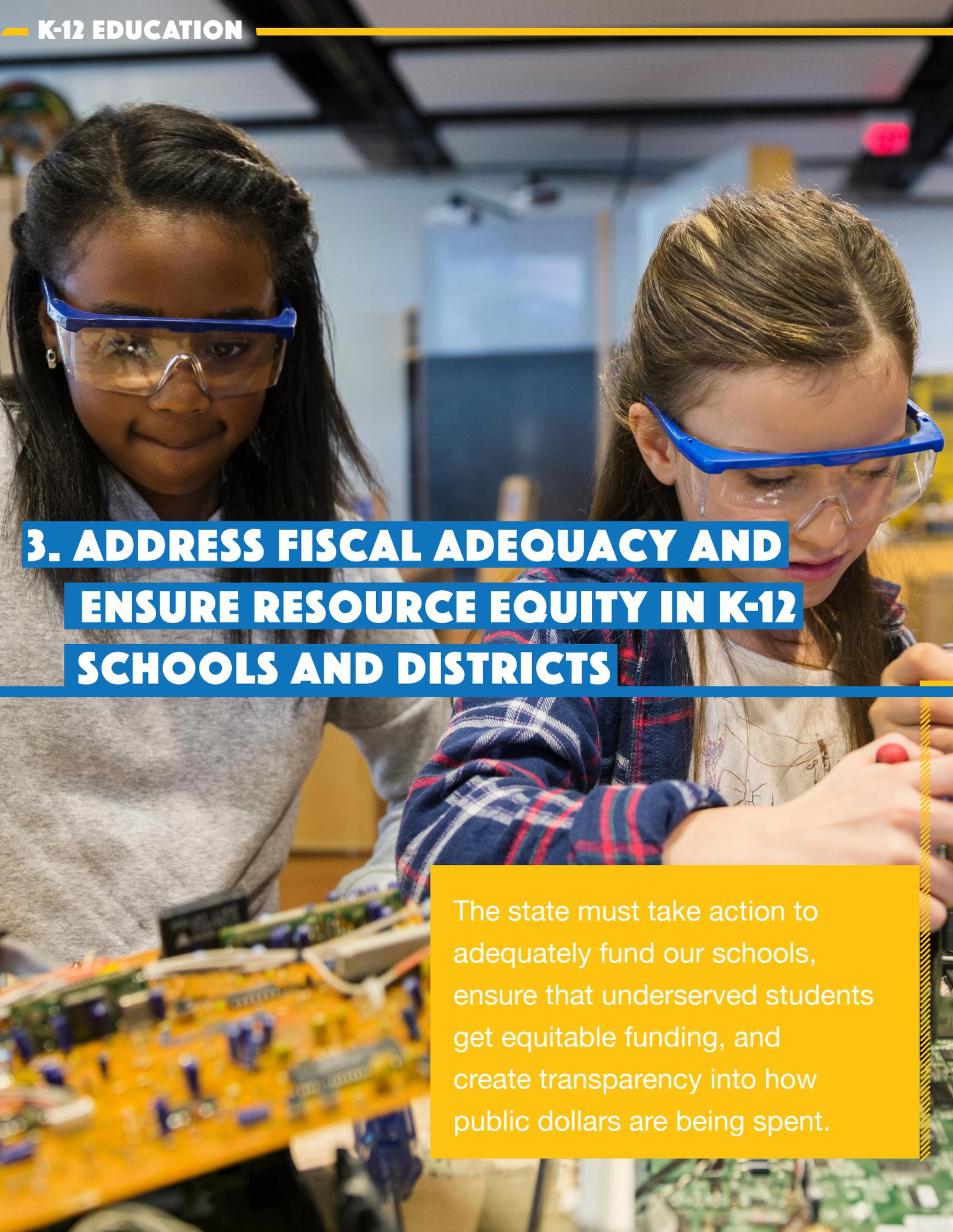
Young people, especially those from low-income families or under-resourced communities, may be more likely to pursue a teaching credential if programs can be completed more quickly and at a lower cost. Loan forgiveness programs, while helpful, demand an upfront investment that can deter some students. The state and institutions of higher education should provide upfront grants in exchange for a commitment to teach in hard-to-staff schools and subject areas. The state should also encourage institutions of higher education to better develop students' subject-matter knowledge, while re-evaluating tests that can serve as gatekeepers or be biased against candidates. Finally, the state should support the expansion of more four-year teaching programs and transfer pathways.

E. Strengthen the state's system of teacher monitoring and assistance to ensure every student has access to well-prepared, appropriately placed, and effective teachers.

This will demand the state create better connections between data systems used by the CDE and the Commission on Teacher Credentialing. Well-designed data linkages will help align teacher preparation programs' recruitment strategies with local districts' needs, track where candidates end up, surface teachers' reasons for leaving the profession, ensure that teachers are appropriately assigned, and shed light on the diversity of teacher candidates. The state should provide guidance to and encourage districts to use the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) to set bold goals around recruiting and retaining high-quality and diverse educators, and it should also integrate data about teacher quality into the Dashboard.

F. Support and retain our best teachers, especially those working in high-need schools.

Teachers in higher need schools often face tougher working conditions and tend to turn over at higher rates.⁴ Teachers of color also face additional challenges: For example, they are often tasked with duties not expected from White teachers, such as translation or discipline, and are not always valued as instructional leaders.⁵ To retain effective teachers and teachers of color, the state should ensure they have access to high-quality induction and mentorship programs, differentiated professional development opportunities that address their unique challenges, time to collaborate with other educators, opportunities to lead, and fair pay for the job they are doing. In addition, the state should ensure that all educators receive ongoing training around racial identity and implicit bias, and that principals in particular are equipped with tools and strategies to create diverse, inclusive, and equitable working conditions.

A photograph of two young girls in a classroom setting, focused on working on a yellow circuit board. Both girls are wearing blue safety goggles. The girl on the left is a Black girl with long dark hair, and the girl on the right is a white girl with long brown hair. They are both looking intently at the board. The background is slightly blurred, showing a typical classroom environment with shelves and equipment.

3. ADDRESS FISCAL ADEQUACY AND ENSURE RESOURCE EQUITY IN K-12 SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS

The state must take action to adequately fund our schools, ensure that underserved students get equitable funding, and create transparency into how public dollars are being spent.

The Local Control Funding Formula has shifted greater resources to higher need school districts, correcting inequities of the past. This has been hugely important because it recognizes that low-income students, English learners, and foster youth have historically been underserved and often need increased and improved services in order to achieve at the same level as their more advantaged peers. But California school districts are still struggling financially.

Although revenues have risen, California still ranks 41ST nationally in per-pupil spending after adjusting for differences in the cost of living, and it has more students per teacher, administrator, and counselor than any other state.⁶ Pensions, health benefits, and other costs are skyrocketing, and in many districts, these obligations are squeezing out important programs and services. Unfortunately, these decisions often have the most detrimental impact on historically underserved students. The state must take action to adequately fund our schools, ensure that underserved students get equitable funding, and create transparency into how public dollars are being spent.

WE RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING:

A. Increase funding for LCFF, investing in equity

first. Now that the state has reached its initial LCFF funding targets, lawmakers must consider what happens next with LCFF. Research shows that more funding leads to better results, especially when more is invested to support low-income students.⁷ State leaders should therefore use this time to expand California's commitment to the equity proposition of the formula. This could include increasing the amount of funding going into the supplemental and concentration grants, or better concentrating those supplemental dollars in districts with the greatest needs. State leaders should also commit to increasing per-pupil funding overall and make that happen not only by setting aspirational targets, but by raising new revenues. State leaders can also encourage school districts to leverage funding sources outside of Prop 98—including federal, state, county, and health and human service funds.

B. Minimize the negative impact of rising pension obligations on services for students.

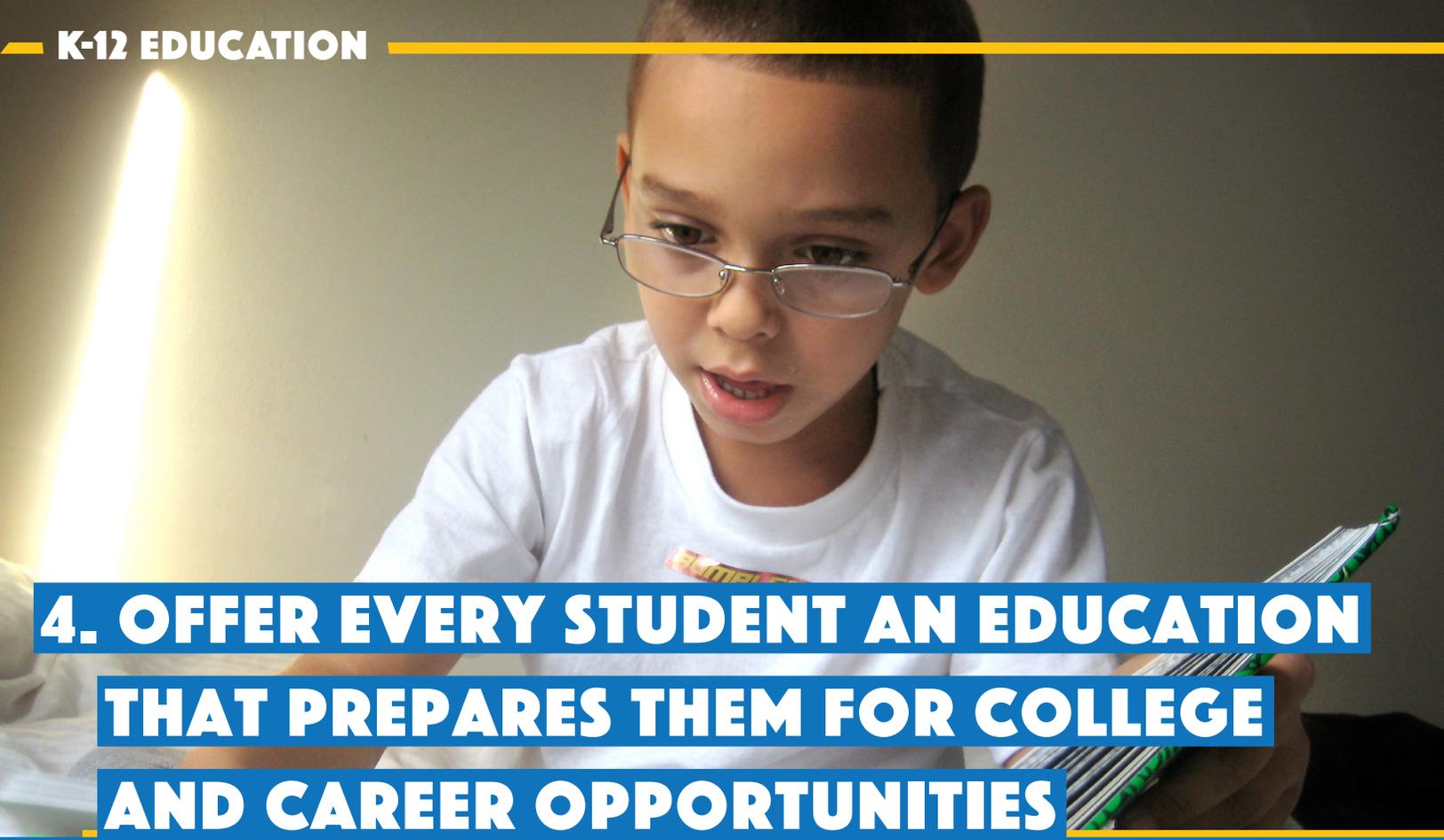
The state must maintain its commitments to teachers and retirees, but it also must ease the impact on local school districts and students. California districts are spending less in the classroom each year, and more on retirement costs. Over the next three years, roughly half of the increase in K-12 funding will be taken up by increases in district pension contributions.⁸ The amount districts are spending on pensions and other benefits has risen by about 50 percent since 2013.⁹ This is an equity issue, because reductions in services impact vulnerable students the most. Further, it makes teaching harder since budget cuts lead to larger class sizes and fewer support services. State leaders must identify ways to address pensions and expensive lifetime benefits to reduce debt and future liabilities without harming the teaching profession. In addition, local school boards should refuse to make promises to current employees that their districts cannot afford in the future.

C. Improve transparency so all stakeholders know how public education funding is being spent and what services are being provided.

Although local communities have embraced the flexibility of LCFF, stakeholders cannot always tell how that money is being spent on school sites or on actions designed to increase or improve services for historically underserved students. There are multiple things the state should do to improve transparency: First, make it easier to see exactly how much districts are spending on each action and service and across LCAP goals. Second, revamp the school accounting code system so that it tracks and reports meaningful categories of spending. Third, report per-pupil school site expenditure data in easy-to-access state reports. And fourth, help county offices of education and districts build the capacity of local stakeholders to engage in district and school budgeting and planning.

D. Fix within-district resource inequities.

In cases where schools or districts are identified for assistance or intervention, require that the district present a plan for how it will address inequitable resources, opportunities, or services within the district and schools. This plan, which could be integrated with the LCAP, should address how the district will more equitably allocate resources, including high-quality teachers, support personnel, broad and rigorous courses, early childhood education opportunities, enrichment opportunities, and facilities.



4. OFFER EVERY STUDENT AN EDUCATION THAT PREPARES THEM FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

The State Board of Education should incentivize college *and* career readiness.

California's new standards guide educators to teach rigorous content aligned with college and career readiness to all students. The groundbreaking new English Learner Roadmap policy encourages leaders and educators to embrace linguistic diversity as an asset. The Local Control Funding Formula asks districts to prioritize not just academics, but also student engagement and positive school climate.

Despite these reforms, many California students are still underprepared for college success and the increasingly complex 21st century. By third grade, only 44% of all students meet standards in reading, and only 33% of Latino students do. Only 50% of students complete high school having passed the sequence of courses necessary for entrance to our California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) campuses, and only 24% of English learners meet those requirements.

When it comes to improving teaching, learning, and college readiness, district and school leaders play a major role. For instance, district leaders choose curriculum, set local graduation requirements, and adopt default course pathways. But state leaders must also play a role, especially in setting statewide expectations for college and career readiness and removing obstacles to opportunity.

TO STRENGTHEN COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS, CALIFORNIA LEADERS SHOULD DO THE FOLLOWING:

A. Expand access to college preparatory

coursework. To increase the likelihood that students will graduate ready for college, the state could do a number of things. First, establish the 15-course A-G sequence as the default pathway, allowing students to opt out only if needed. This could be done without changing state graduation requirements, which should be revisited regardless to better align with state standards. Second, incentivize greater access to dual-enrollment courses. Third, create model courses or disseminate best practices that show how English Language Development (ELD) standards can be fully integrated into A-G content. Finally, establish a single course management system with common codes connecting K-12 and UC-approved course lists. This will help the state better measure A-G access, streamline the process of applying to UC and CSU, and minimize administrative errors that impact student eligibility.

B. Prioritize college and career readiness in the state accountability system.

In 2017, the State Board of Education adopted a college/career indicator as part of the Dashboard. Unfortunately, this indicator awards points to districts and schools for achieving college *or* career readiness. This communicates a belief that college is an option for some, but not for all — and history tells us that this can lead to discriminatory systems of tracking. Instead, the SBE should incentivize college *and* career readiness. The state should also continue its work to make this and other measures applicable to students attending alternative high schools. Finally, the state should add additional data to the Dashboard showing whether schools are providing students with equitable access to a broad course of study.

C. Make the English Learner Roadmap a reality.

In adopting this new policy, the state articulated a vision that English learners will meaningfully participate in learning opportunities that support English language development, academic achievement, and multilingualism. The important work ahead is turning this Roadmap into an action plan. The state should continue its outreach and training efforts to build stakeholders' understanding of the Roadmap and create a centralized, user-friendly resource hub to support local implementation. These resources should include case examples illustrating the instructional and policy shifts called for by the Roadmap, vetted primary language instructional materials, professional learning models, and information on vetted technical assistance providers. The state needs to work to integrate the principles of the Roadmap into the state system of supports, so that local improvement efforts and county and state assistance are aligned with the Roadmap.

D. Continue to support California's implementation of its new state standards.

Although it has been eight years since California adopted the Common Core standards and more than four years since it adopted the Next Generation Science Standards, practitioners are still adjusting to the instructional strategies demanded by these more rigorous standards. This requires extensive professional learning and time for teachers to collaborate within and across the disciplines and grade levels. The state and county offices should continue to invest in professional learning, especially as it relates to NGSS, ELD integration, and collaboration between content area and Special Education educators. These entities can incentivize school and district leaders to create flexible schedules that expand collaboration time and well-structured communities of practice, and it can incentivize regional consortia or counties to offer regional or statewide educator learning and leadership development opportunities.

E. Support student transitions from high school to college.

The state should provide assistance to districts and high schools around how to support historically underserved students in making the important transition from high school to college. Districts and schools could benefit from resources, advice, and assistance on: how to strengthen the role of counselors in college advising, college entrance test preparation practices and fee waiver policies, how to disseminate information to students and families about college and financial aid applications, and family engagement best practices. The state should also link K-12 and postsecondary data systems to illuminate whether and where high school graduates are enrolling in college and how they're faring once they get there.

HIGHER & POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

For generations, California's higher education system has been world class. Our postsecondary institutions, diversity, and ideas have made California a beacon of innovation and prosperity. But now, our colleges and the state are falling short on commitments made and upheld to previous generations. At a time when our state is more diverse than ever before, serious inequities plague higher education in California. This is deeply troubling because a high-quality college degree remains the surest path toward upward mobility and economic freedom.

The inequities are widespread. Thousands of low-income high school seniors leave millions of dollars in financial aid on the table, and many students of color graduate with significant debt.¹⁰ California's public universities are struggling to find spaces for qualified students.¹¹ Our colleges and universities provide fewer academic and social supports than our students need to succeed, and this is especially the case for students of color.

Further, California's education data systems are disconnected and inadequate, making it nearly impossible to answer critical questions about coordination and alignment between K-12 and higher education. It is also very difficult to understand whether and how well our colleges and universities are doing at providing opportunities for all students or improving equity.

Our education leaders must re-envision our higher education institutions and systems so that every Californian, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or income has the skills and education they need to be upwardly mobile, participate in the workforce, and contribute to civic life.



WE RECOMMEND THAT STATE LEADERS FOCUS ON THREE MAIN LEVERS:

- 1. Improve student access to and success in postsecondary education**
- 2. Ensure college is affordable, and provide a pathway for students to graduate without debt**
- 3. Foster and improve accountability and transparency in our institutions of higher education**



**1. IMPROVE STUDENT
ACCESS TO AND SUCCESS
IN POST SECONDARY EDUCATION**

State leaders must update the Master Plan for Higher Education so it reflects contemporary demographic and economic trends and needs.

Our state suffers from deep inequities that our colleges and universities often exacerbate. Access to college in California is stratified by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, and too many institutions of higher education fail students of color and low-income students at alarming rates.

TO IMPROVE ACCESS AND EQUITY, STATE LEADERS MUST MAKE PROGRESS ON THE FOLLOWING:

A. Strengthen Promise Programs and incentivize K-12 and postsecondary partnerships that support college access and success.

In recent years, community demand across the state resulted in a number of K-12 and higher education institutions, organizations, and municipalities coming together to cultivate and support a culture of college-going expectations and broad college access and success. Many of these efforts fall under the umbrella of place-based “Promise Programs” or initiatives and are funded by a combination of philanthropic, business, and nonprofit partnerships. State leaders should continue to identify strategies that incentivize more sustainable, locally-coordinated college access and success partnerships — whether they be Promise Programs or otherwise. These collaborative relationships can support other activities that can ease students’ transitions to college, such as data sharing, early college outreach, dual enrollment, priority admission and registration, leadership development programs, and college prep/transition programs like Summer Bridge.

B. Update California’s Master Plan for Higher Education and broaden access for California’s growing and more diverse population.

The 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education promised an accessible, affordable, and high-quality Californian postsecondary system. Nearly 60 years later, California is facing a shortage of college graduates.¹² And although more high school graduates meet eligibility requirements, the CSU and UC systems have not expanded access enough to keep up with demand — especially among underrepresented students of color and low-income students. State leaders must update the Master Plan so it reflects contemporary demographic and economic trends and needs. State leaders must guarantee a spot at the CSU and UC for all eligible students and strengthen cross-segmental goals for transfer, completion, and equity. A true commitment by the state to broadening access will also require additional state funding, repeal of Proposition 209’s ban on affirmative action, and improvement of facilities so that institutions have the necessary resources and strategies to expand opportunities and success for all students.

C. Effectively implement new assessment and placement policies.

Until very recently, far too many community college students — particularly students of color — were inappropriately placed in remedial courses, effectively blocking them from accessing credit-bearing coursework.¹³ Due to recent changes, community colleges must now consider multiple academic measures such as GPA and course history in determining whether students are ready for college-level classes, and the CSU system is following suit

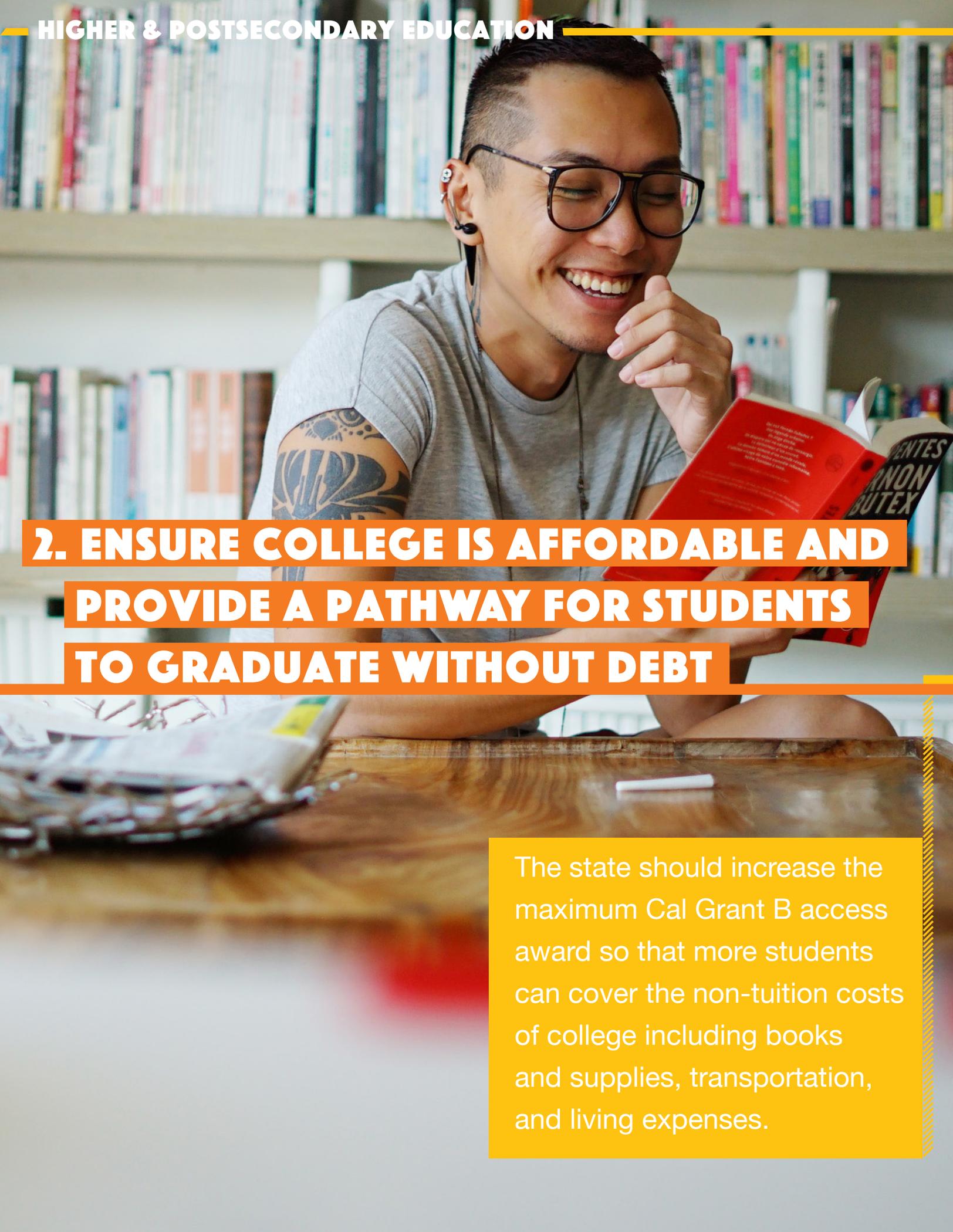
with similar policy changes. While these promising reforms may reduce student enrollment in remedial coursework and increase persistence and completion, districts and colleges need resources to effectively launch courses with added support, such as co-requisite courses, and to offer other academic supports, such as bridge programs that help ease the transition to college. Further, state leaders must make available and track the necessary data to monitor these reforms.

D. Promote seamless opportunities for degree completion and transfer from community college to universities.

Community colleges present a financially viable and accessible starting point for many students in their postsecondary journeys. Indeed, students of color are more likely to attend community colleges than public four-year universities. But far too often, students do not complete a certificate or associate’s degree, and those desiring to transfer get stuck, enrolling in a series of disconnected courses without a clear path to a four-year university. Fortunately, the state and our public systems have enacted several recent policy changes to streamline these community college pathways. Now, the state must support coordination of leaders across postsecondary segments to ensure these policies are implemented effectively and equitably. State leaders should also support the expansion of work already started at some community colleges to develop clearly articulated pathways that provide academic and other supports and are aligned with CSU and UC transfer requirements.

E. Improve postsecondary success.

Choices made by leaders of higher education institutions have a significant impact on who graduates and who doesn’t. Institutions that prioritize student success graduate more students, and those who are committed to improving graduation rates of students who face barriers due to affordability and other socioeconomic factors can do just that.¹⁴ To support student success, legislators must ensure base funding for all three public college systems is adequate and incentivize degree completion. They must also direct additional resources to institutions serving high concentrations of needy students — as our Governor and legislators recently did for community colleges when they passed the landmark student success formula. We also recommend state leaders increase funding for grants to institutions that incentivize the adoption, implementation, and scaling of innovative, evidence-based practices. State and system leaders should conduct rigorous evaluations of innovations and publicly report results disaggregated by race and income.

A young man with short dark hair, glasses, and a tattoo on his left arm is sitting at a wooden table in a library. He is smiling broadly while reading a red book. The background is filled with bookshelves. The text '2. ENSURE COLLEGE IS AFFORDABLE AND PROVIDE A PATHWAY FOR STUDENTS TO GRADUATE WITHOUT DEBT' is overlaid in white on an orange background.

2. ENSURE COLLEGE IS AFFORDABLE AND PROVIDE A PATHWAY FOR STUDENTS TO GRADUATE WITHOUT DEBT

The state should increase the maximum Cal Grant B access award so that more students can cover the non-tuition costs of college including books and supplies, transportation, and living expenses.

Over the last 30 years, state disinvestment in public higher education in California has shifted the burden of balancing the state budget onto the backs of students and families.¹⁵ Although the state has one of the most generous financial aid programs in the nation, providing over \$2.2 billion in need-based aid, many students continue to struggle with the cost of education, not to mention food and housing insecurity.¹⁶

This underscores the critical importance of strengthening institutional and state financial aid policies to cover the total cost of college for a diverse student body.

State leaders have a responsibility to first make sure the students most impacted by inequities — including students of color, low-income students, first generation students, undocumented students, foster youth, present and formerly incarcerated youth, and returning adults — have the resources and supports they need to attend college and graduate without crushing debt.

WE RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING:

A. Improve financial aid awareness and

interventions. The California Student Aid Commission (CSAC), through its Cash for College workshops and the California Student Opportunity and Access Program (Cal-SOAP) network, provides outreach and advising services to local communities across the state. Still, only 53% of California's 474,160 seniors completed the FAFSA in the 2017-2018 academic year, and just 65% completed the Cal Grant or the California Dream Act application, which means that millions of dollars in college aid may have been left on the table.¹⁷ State leaders must provide CSAC with additional resources so it can broaden its communication and engagement with districts, schools, students, colleges and universities, and communities. CSAC must make additional efforts to learn more about the impact of early commitment financial aid and student-tested, technology-enabled outreach and platforms.

B. Simplify the financial aid application process.

Cal Grant application rates have been steadily rising, but they are still not high enough. The state has streamlined the financial aid application process by requiring high schools to electronically submit all of their twelfth graders' GPAs to CSAC, which has helped, but students still face barriers in successfully completing a Cal Grant application.¹⁸ For example, their schools may have inadequate data systems, or their counselors may lack awareness about the process. State leaders have an opportunity now to learn from early lessons and eliminate the GPA requirement altogether. Eliminating the GPA requirement would impact more students and is a commonsense solution as colleges already consider academic performance for admissions. State leaders should also require that high schools create structured opportunities for students and families to complete the FAFSA and California Dream Act Application.

C. Broaden and guarantee access to the Cal

Grant. California has a responsibility to provide the opportunity for all students with financial needs to access the resources necessary to pursue and complete a postsecondary credential. Right now, applicants who delay college enrollment for more than a year following high school graduation or who transfer after the age of 28 are effectively shut out of the Cal Grant program due to a highly competitive secondary selection process. Due to insufficient funding, in 2017-18, there were over 400,000 eligible competitive Cal Grant applicants for just 25,750 awards.¹⁹ Eligibility should not be based on time-bound and age-based restrictions that have significant impacts on communities of color and older students. State leaders must commit to investing more in our financial aid system so that it reaches more Californians and so that all eligible applicants are entitled to receive a Cal Grant. Specifically, legislators must increase the number of annual authorized competitive Cal Grants.

D. Adjust financial aid programs to address non-tuition expenses.

Despite California's robust financial aid program, average student loan debt has risen from \$16,071 to \$22,744 from 2004 to 2016 — a 42% increase.²⁰ Because the current system is tuition-centric, far too many students are left with unmet financial need driven by the high cost of living in California. The state must recommit to keeping college affordable, explore reasonable options for covering unmet need, and implement changes to the Cal Grant. As a critical next step, the state should increase the maximum Cal Grant B access award so that more students can cover the non-tuition costs of college including books and supplies, transportation, and living expenses.

A photograph of three young men sitting around a dark table in a study area. They are looking at a laptop and several sheets of paper. One man is pointing at the screen. A coffee cup is on the table. The background is blurred, showing other people in a similar setting.

**3. FOSTER AND IMPROVE
ACCOUNTABILITY AND
TRANSPARENCY IN OUR
INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

State and segment leaders have a responsibility to provide the public and other stakeholders information about the performance of our colleges and universities. Therefore, it is unacceptable that basic information about the performance of colleges and universities in the state cannot be found. Students, families, legislators, administrators, and other stakeholders need more data, and they need this data in an accessible format that can help guide decision making.

STATE AND SEGMENT LEADERS MUST WORK TOGETHER TO ACCOMPLISH THE FOLLOWING INTERRELATED POLICY CHANGES:

A. (Re)create and fund a coordinating entity. In 2011, the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) — California’s state coordinating board — was defunded by Governor Jerry Brown. Its closure made California only one of two states without a coordinating agency for higher education. In its absence, state attainment goals remain unarticulated, intersegmental collaboration is piecemeal at best, and public availability of data about the performance of our colleges and university is limited. State leaders should establish and fund an autonomous coordinating board empowered to identify state priorities and needs, and it should maintain a data clearinghouse on the performance of the segments and workforce needs.

B. Define and set goals for higher and postsecondary education. California is one of only 7 states without a statewide postsecondary attainment goal.²¹ The California Community Colleges and the California State University system have each articulated system-wide attainment goals, representing a significant and important step forward for our state. However, we can and must do more. State leaders should follow the leadership of the CCC and CSU and, in collaboration with segment leaders, workforce partners, and other stakeholders, define and articulate statewide postsecondary attainment goals that are ambitious, quantifiable, and time-bound. Furthermore, the state should incentivize all colleges and universities to develop policies and practices that specifically address racial equity gaps, and it should hold systems accountable for showing improvement over time.

C. Collect, make available, and utilize intersegmental P-20 education data.

Californians lack a complete picture of how well our school systems are serving students, because our data systems are uncoordinated and fragmented. There is almost no coordination and alignment between P-12 and postsecondary education data systems, and the systems we do have are difficult to use. We cannot afford to have such blind spots. State leaders must work to construct a comprehensive and longitudinal data system that enables stakeholders to answer questions about access and transitions to and through higher education as well as completion, cost, and outcomes, and that also maintains student privacy. These data must be disaggregated and made publicly available and easily accessible to a variety of stakeholder groups, including students, families, and advocates. Finally, institutions should be incentivized to use the data to inform evidence-based decision making.

There is almost no coordination and alignment between P-12 and postsecondary education data systems, and the systems we do have are difficult to use.

CONCLUSION

Over the next year and beyond, California's new leaders will need to make important decisions about the continued implementation of existing education policy, what adjustments need to be made, and how to better expedite the pace of what is working. We know that every student in our schools and on our campuses deserves a rigorous, engaging, and relevant education that prepares them for meaningful careers and civic life. Students need this now, not years down the road. We believe that some fundamental shifts are needed if California is going to achieve significantly better results for its young people, particularly students of color, students in poverty, English learners, and other marginalized youth in this generation.

The policy recommendations included here can serve as a roadmap for how California's leaders can strengthen our existing systems, intentionally create opportunities for all learners, and bring equity to the center of how we make decisions about our K-12 schools and colleges. This is a path we must travel with great speed if we are to maintain California's position as a progressive, innovative leader in the nation and the world. Achieving this change will demand sound policy, but also political will and bold leadership.

We look forward to working alongside those leaders who are ready to stand for equity today, tomorrow, and beyond.

ENDNOTES

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