

## **Recommendations: Policy Imperatives and Principles for Change**

### **Policy Imperatives**

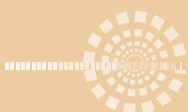
California Community Colleges are in the midst of a heroic struggle to respond to Tidal Wave II, which is presenting campuses and districts with the dual challenges of responding to unprecedented growth and accommodating the needs of a culturally and linguistically diverse student body. Any policy or system reform to improve the capacity and efficacy of the colleges must begin with a full understanding of who the students are and what we know to be the keys to ensuring their success. Responding to this growth amidst the dramatic demographic shifts in the community college student body will require state resources and leadership commensurate with the task at hand. As California Tomorrow works with others to engage community, civic, and business leaders in working to strengthen community colleges, we offer the following set of policy imperatives:

**Ensure Adequate Funding.** Community colleges need significantly more resources. We support recent leadership efforts to address “unfunded growth,” with particular emphasis on campuses and districts most impacted by Tidal Wave II. The costs of providing quality instruction and support services far outstrip current per pupil levels of support. If community college leaders are to succeed in their efforts to align instructional and support services around the needs of their changing student bodies, they will need all the resources promised them under Proposition 98 and more. They will also need the flexibility to undertake and sustain innovative campus efforts to serve more community members in their regions.

**Expand Effective Support Programs.** All students, but especially those who face the greatest obstacles to education, succeed in school when they have a comprehensive and holistic set of basic supports—financial aid, tutoring, counseling, positive interaction with faculty, and childcare. Cohort support programs like Puente, CALWORKS, CARE, and others have proven effective in significantly improving outcomes for students of color, immigrants, and low-income women and men. These programs offer “best practices” templates for reorganizing campus support services. At present, only a small percentage of the students who most need these supports are covered by these model programs. Campus and system leaders need the resources and leadership to make use of these models to transform institutional practices.

**Increase Financial Aid.** Balancing work and family obligations while attending school is cited by the overwhelming majority of community college students as the top challenge to their progress. Increasing access to financial aid, including child care assistance, is essential for low-income students. To improve completion rates among students who rely the most on Community Colleges, it is imperative that campus, system, and state leaders find ways to increase financial support and publicize its availability in order to increase the numbers of students who apply for assistance.

**Protect Gateway Courses.** Basic skills courses are proven boosters of success for students of color, immigrants, and working students, and are essential to maintaining an open pipeline to higher education. Unless the trend toward under-preparedness among entering students is magically



reversed in the near future, policy decisions that result in severe cuts to basic skills classes will severely constrain the pipeline at the very moment the need to expand it is greatest. Reducing the number of years students take to achieve their academic objectives requires that entering students be able to get the courses they need to embark on intensive skill building during their first year. To maximize their success, the skills curriculum must be augmented by the orientation, counseling, and peer support programs that have proven invaluable in facilitating students' success. The costs saved by reducing the number of failed attempts at classes students are unprepared for and improving student planning are likely to be substantial over the long haul.

**Strengthen Instruction.** Students of color, immigrants, and low-income students cite access to talented, approachable faculty as the most influential source of motivation and engagement to remain in college when the going gets rough. The effectiveness of the system is dependent upon faculty who understand the needs of their diverse students. If the achievement numbers are to be significantly improved, campus and system leaders will need to invest resources and leadership in improving faculty capacity to teach ever more diverse students. Efforts to diversify and evaluate faculty, create standards for cultural competency, and implement new instructional methodologies need to be viewed less as matters of “racial entitlement” and more as matters of institutional efficacy. Like professionals in any industry, those in the teaching profession need to be encouraged and supported to adapt their approaches to new realities.

**Strengthen Workforce Training & Preparation.** Across the state, community colleges are key providers of workforce training for California's business sectors and the growth industries that will ensure on going economic health. The colleges offer low-income working adults a lifeline to transition to new employment sectors during difficult economic times. Strengthening the capacity of community colleges to partner with regional business leaders and public sector employment training resources is critical, as is the need to leverage resources across these systems. At the same time, the success of these efforts is dependent on the availability of the basic skills courses and support services that are so often targeted when budgets are cut. Workforce training is an integral part of the mission of CCC, and it should be strengthened and expanded.

**Strengthen System Level Support for Efforts to Address Access & Equity.** Community colleges, like any other institution in our society, will not change without clear vision, leadership, strategies, plans, and resources. Vigorous leadership to understand and address access and equity issues is vitally needed at this juncture if community colleges are to increase the success rates of our most vulnerable students - now the majority of students enrolled. In 2002 the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges adopted Student Equity guidelines that faculty and administration leaders could use to undertake comprehensive campus change efforts to improve access and success for our most vulnerable students. Unfortunately, the modest resources originally allocated to further these efforts have disappeared—as a result of budget cutbacks. Resources must be restored so that campus leaders can proceed with building the consensus and the leadership for a comprehensive response to the access and equity needs of each college's diverse student body.



## Principles to Guide Policy Change

The preceding imperatives constitute a proactive access and equity agenda for community college policy. But moving these specific policy priorities forward in a state facing financial difficulties and competing priorities will be a challenge. Therefore, in addition to the policy recommendations and priorities, we also propose a set of principles to be used to frame policy dialogue about the future of California's community colleges.

**Commit to Open Access Enrollment.** Seek an agreement that the historic promise of open access to higher education is critical to California's social well-being and economic competitiveness, and will not be compromised.

**Preserve the Broad Mission of the Community Colleges.** Given the pivotal role community colleges play in preparing Californians for the workforce and for four year colleges, it is essential that the goal of improving the transfer function and the goal of expanding workforce training be viewed as equally important priorities.

**Do Not Resolve Funding Problems On the Backs of Students (No Fee Increases).** Improving the financial position of the community colleges is a key to increasing their effectiveness in meeting the needs of their changing and growing student bodies. Resolving the financial challenges must not fall to the students, however. In the last two years, students have been forced to absorb a 136% increase (from \$11 to \$26 per unit). Raises in fees constitute new barriers to access.

**Don't Pit K-12 Against Community Colleges.** Solutions that invest in both systems are essential to an open pipeline and a strong California. Efforts to improve outcomes in K-12 public education and community colleges are of critical importance to the low-income communities of color our state will increasingly depend on. Resolving the financial challenges of the K-12 system should not come at the expense of the community colleges. Similarly, addressing the financial needs of the community college system should not come at the expense of the K-12 system.

**Success Requires Not Just Access, But Support.** Efforts to require students to move through the community colleges in shorter time frames without the supports needed for success will fail. Cuts in counseling and holistic support services will erect new barriers to student progress.

**Remember Who the Students Are, and Their Unique Needs.** Knowledge of the needs and circumstances of students, including cultural and linguistic considerations, income status, and employment responsibilities should be the starting point for policy deliberations.

**Take the Long View.** The future of California requires a long view on state funding. Community colleges will need to count on stable funding to engage in the long-term planning needed to become more effective in meeting the needs of their changing student bodies. Funding public education is an investment with a huge return in a strengthened economy.

