

Contra Costa

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School failings carry dire consequences, report says

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California needs to fix its education-system problems or face serious social and economic consequences, according to a study by Sacramento State researchers.

The report, released Thursday by the Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy, noted alarming trends at all levels of public schools. For example, it found that fewer California high school graduates are going straight to college, which cuts their chances of attending college at all.

"We want to issue a very strong warning that if we do not close the gaps ... we will see a decline in the social and economic health of the state," said Nancy Shulock, the institute's director. "We're going to see the older, more educated people leave the workforce, to be replaced by younger, less educated workers."

Among the study's conclusions:

- High school graduates do not have adequate math and science skills;

- California's per-student spending on college education ranks 49th in the United States;

- Latino and African-American students are performing significantly worse than other racial groups.

Most of the findings have been mentioned in other studies over the past two years. Policymakers don't seem to be aware

of how serious the problems are, especially in higher education, Shulock said.

"I don't think they've heard (the message)," she said. "There's been a tendency to think it's just a K-12 problem."

One problem is that term limits make it difficult to find legislators familiar with the issues, said Assemblywoman Carol Liu, D-La Canada Flintridge, who heads the Assembly Higher Education Committee.

"The solutions are doable," she said. "It's just a matter of will and resources."

The report recommended that lawmakers and educators concentrate on closing the racial gaps in high-school graduation and college-participation rates and foster a "college culture" beginning in kindergarten.

Researchers also noted several regional differences in educational success. Whereas half the eighth-graders in the Bay Area and Orange County are proficient in language skills, only about one-third reached that level in the San Joaquin Valley, Los Angeles County and Inland Empire.

The study was commissioned by the nonprofit Campaign for College Opportunity and funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

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