

Methodology

“Variations on a Theme” is an analysis of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education’s September 2004 “Measuring Up” report. It analyzes the measures, as well as additional performance indicators, and breaks down performance by race and region of the state.

Regional gaps

The study found substantial regional variations in college participation, preparation and success. For example, the Central Valley and the Inland Empire, two of the regions noted by the Public Policy Institute of California’s “California 2025” study as having the highest population growth, also have among the lowest rates of college participation. Some specific regional findings of the “Variations” study include:

- The college-going rate directly from high school varies from a high of 67 percent in the Central Coast to a low of 26 percent in the Upper Sacramento Valley. Statewide, the average college-going rate directly from high school is 37 percent, which is lower than the national average of 40 percent.
- The number of bachelor’s degrees awarded as a share of enrollment is highest for students from the Central Coast (nearly 24 percent) and lowest for students from the Inland Empire (more than 16 percent).
- There are differences in college completion rates by region, but the primary concern is that completion rates are uniformly low across the state.

Racial differences

California ranks 50th – dead last – among all states in the drop-off between the share of Latinos and African Americans in the 18-year-old population and the share of undergraduate degrees awarded to students in those ethnic groups. Surprisingly, while high school dropout rates and college dropout rates contribute to this problem, the main reason California lags behind other states is that comparatively fewer high school graduates from those underrepresented groups go directly to college. Some more specific ethnic differences findings include:

- Californians of Asian descent have the highest rate of participation in postsecondary education. Sixty percent of Asian young adults are enrolled in college, as compared to 43 percent of white youth, 32 percent of African American youth and 22 percent of young Latinos.
- The number of bachelor’s degrees awarded per 100 undergraduates enrolled is highest for white students (more than 22 percent) and lowest for African American students (17 percent).
- Latinos lag behind other racial/ethnic groups in levels of college preparation, participation and completion, which is particularly troubling as the Latino share of the state’s working-age population reaches 36 percent by 2010, and nearly 50 percent 10 years later.
- The differences across racial/ethnic groups in college graduation rates are less than the differences in college participation, indicating that the biggest barrier facing the state in reducing educational gaps is in increasing college participation rates, especially among African Americans and Latinos.

