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Early College Commitment:

A SOLUTION FOR EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
AND ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

Introduction

Once the nation and the world's leader in higher education, California faces serious challenges over the next two decades in educating its population. Unless California makes significant gains in the level of educational attainment of its population, and aggressively pursues policies that promote college access and success, the future prosperity and economic competitiveness of the State will be at risk.

This report is intended to inform California education leaders and policymakers about a promising solution that can help improve educational attainment in California – Early College Commitment. Through this policy, the State of California will commit a place in college and financial aid to eligible middle and high school students who sign a Save Me a Spot in College Pledge and take steps to prepare themselves for the opportunity.

This report presents research findings that show:

- Declining educational attainment at exactly the time when the California economy is demanding greater levels of education – and the consequences of this divergence for the State.
- A significant gap between the aspirations of low-income families for their children to pursue higher education and their lack of knowledge of how to prepare and pay for college.
- Recommendations to policy makers for the design of a statewide Early College Commitment program in California.
- Successful model programs locally in California and elsewhere in the United States that have made an early commitment of college access and financial aid to students.

The Campaign for

**College
Opportunity**

Spring 2007

“[The Master Plan was the] first time in the history of any state in the United States, or any nation in the world, where such a commitment was made – that a state or a nation would promise there would be a place ready for every high school graduate or person otherwise qualified. It was an enormous commitment, and the basis for the Master Plan”
 (Greenwood 2005).

~ Clark Kerr, former President of the University of California
 (pictured below on the cover of Time Magazine, October 17, 1960)



Our History and Core Values

Early College Commitment is based on two values widely shared by Californians—**educational opportunity** and **joint responsibility**. Education is a gift that is given by one generation to the next. Californians believe in giving every motivated high school student the opportunity to pursue higher education, regardless of their financial means or background. In addition, we see this as a joint responsibility shared by schools, colleges and the State, who together must provide the opportunities, and by students and families, who must prepare for and seek the opportunities.

In 1960, the Master Plan for Higher Education advanced California as an innovative and forward-thinking leader in higher education, both in our nation and worldwide. It established the principle of universal access to college—to grant access to college to any student with an interest in pursuing higher education. It also helped make California what it is today, with an economy that excels in innovation.

Our commitment to the principles of the Master Plan today is at a crossroads. We can strengthen that commitment by making it directly to young people and their families beginning in middle school. Or we can let California continue its educational decline and face the economic and social consequences of a less educated workforce, declining per capita personal income and tax revenue, and increasing incarceration and reliance on social services.

The Problem: Declining Educational Attainment, Growing Economic Demands

Just as California’s economy is demanding a better educated workforce, and facing the prospect of replacing the highly educated Baby Boomers as they retire, the state faces declining educational attainment among its young population.

Declining Educational Attainment

A review of recent research shows that California grapples with a multifaceted set of issues in moving its middle and high school students through the ed-

ucation pipeline and successfully into and through higher education. These issues are particularly problematic for minority and low-income students who face many factors that place them at risk for dropping out of high school or being inadequately prepared for college.

High dropout rates, poor preparation for college, low direct college-going rates, regional and racial variation, and low parental education are just a few of the issues that complicate the ability of young Californians to attend college, and once there, to succeed.

Persistent Achievement Gap: California faces a persistent achievement gap based on income, ethnicity and other factors, not only in English and in math, but also in other subjects such as science. For example, low-income students achieve proficiency in English at *half* the rate of their more affluent peers. Although there have been improvements in recent years, notably in the elementary grades, these gains seem to dissipate in middle school and high school (Education Trust-West 2006).

High School Dropouts: Researchers estimate that 31% of what would have been the class of 2004 dropped out of high school sometime between the 9th and 12th grades (Rogers et al. 2006:2), which negatively affects their future economic opportunities. If these students do go to college, they begin their college education with considerable ground to make in mastering basic skills.

Lack of Career Technical Opportunities: Opportunities to pursue postsecondary career technical education, especially in community college, are nearly invisible to California youth, yet students demonstrate an interest in these opportunities. A 2006 survey of 9th and 10th graders conducted for The James Irvine Foundation found that a majority of students (73%) reported they would be more motivated to do well in school if academic work was closely related to real-world, workforce applications (Hart 2006).

Low A-G Completion: A little over one quarter of the entire class of 2004 (statewide) who graduated from high school completed the A-G curriculum, the

sequence of high school courses required for admission at the CSU and UC, as well as many private four-year colleges (Rogers et al. 2006:2). There are also large racial differences in A-G completion, with black and Hispanic students completing the curriculum at much lower rates.

Direct College Going Rates: In an alarming trend over the last decade, the direct college going rates for all racial and ethnic groups has declined in California. In 2005, California ranked 40th in the nation in the direct college going rates of its high school students. Students who enter college directly following high school are more likely to graduate from college than those who delay college attendance (Moore and Shulock 2006:8-11).

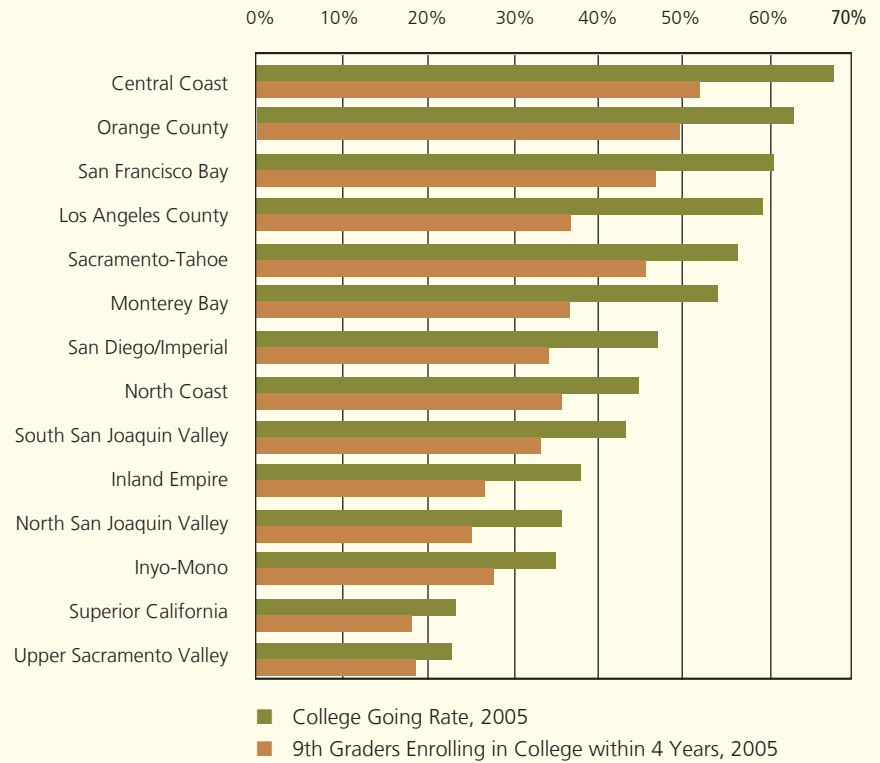
Variation in College Participation by Region: While Orange County and the San Francisco Bay Area send over 60% of high school graduates directly to college, the Central Valley and the Inland Empire send between 20% and 45% of their graduates directly to college (see Figure 1). In

TABLE 1: College Participation Rates for Young Adults Vary Substantially by Region, 2005

REGION	PERCENT OF 18-24 YEAR-OLDS ENROLLED IN COLLEGE
Upper Sacramento Valley	49%
Central Coast	49%
San Francisco Bay	45%
Orange County	45%
Sacramento-Tahoe	40%
San Diego/Imperial	40%
Los Angeles County	38%
Monterey Bay	38%
Inland Empire	33%
North San Joaquin Valley	32%
North Coast	30%
Superior California	24%
South San Joaquin Valley	24%
Inyo-Mono	n/a

Source: California State University, Sacramento, Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy. 2006. *State of Decline? Gaps in College Access and Achievement Call for Renewed Commitment to Educating Californians.*

FIGURE 1: Regional Variation on College-Going Rates



Source: California State University, Sacramento, Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy. 2006. *State of Decline? Gaps in College Access and Achievement Call for Renewed Commitment to Educating Californians.*

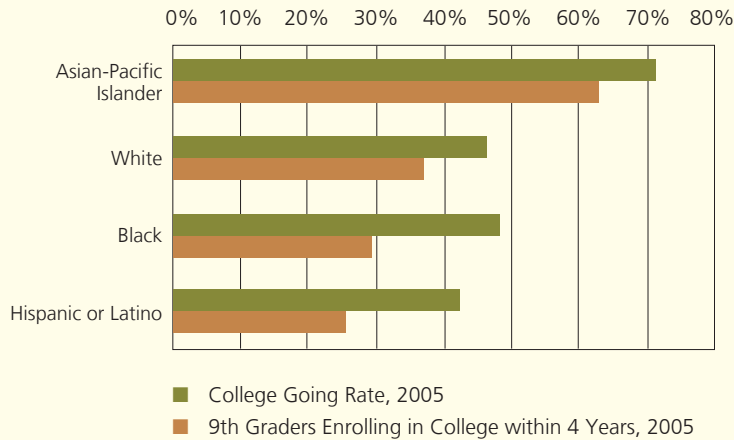
most regions of California, the direct college going rates have declined in the last decade (Moore and Shulock 2006:9-10).

On another measure of access, there are dramatic differences in the college participation rates of young adults by regions of the State (see Table 1). The fast-growing Central Valley and Inland Empire have rates of college participation as low as half that of the top performing regions of the State (Moore and Shulock 2006:9).

Variation in College-Going Rates by Race and Ethnicity:

Over 70% of Asian and Pacific Islanders attend college directly out of high school, although there are disparities within

FIGURE 2: Chance of a 9th Grader to Go to College Varies Substantially by Race/Ethnicity



Source: California State University, Sacramento, Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy. 2006. *State of Decline? Gaps in College Access and Achievement Call for Renewed Commitment to Educating Californians.*

this diverse population. Although the direct college-going rates for white (47%), black (49%), and Hispanic (43%) high school graduates are relatively comparable, they mask a deeper disparity in opportunity: the chance that a black or Hispanic 9th grader enrolls in college within four years is substantially lower than it is for white students because of lower high school graduation rates (Moore and Shulock 2006:11). (See Figure 2.)

Need for Remediation Hurts College

Success: A large percentage of students entering college need remedial courses in basic subjects important to college success, such as English and math. For example, one survey found that approximately 75 percent of students at community college need remedial courses in English and 90 percent need remediation in math (RP Group). The California State University estimates that more than 60 percent of first-time freshmen at CSU need some remedial education in English, math, or both.

Needing further remedial coursework is discouraging to freshmen who “have taken the required college preparatory curriculum and earned at least a B grade point average in high school...these students are confused by seemingly having done the right things in high school only to find out after admission to the CSU that they need further preparation” (CSU Early Assessment Program).

Parental Education: At the same time, children whose parents have less formal education need additional support to finish high school and seek post-secondary education. A child’s level of education is strongly influenced by their parents’ level of education. Children of women with a high school diploma are more than three times as likely to graduate from high school as children of women who did not finish high school. Children of women who have completed a BA are five times more likely to finish high school than children of women with a high school diploma (Brady, Hout and Stiles 2205:54).

TABLE 2: California Loses Proportionally More Black and Latino Students in the Educational Pipeline than the Nation as a Whole

	PERCENT OF 18 YEAR-OLD POPULATION	PERCENT OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES	PERCENT OF FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN	PERCENT OF UNDERGRADUATE CERTIFICATES/ DEGREES AWARDED	DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AWARDS AND 18 YEAR-OLD POPULATION
California	47.8%	39.9%	30.6%	25.4%	-22.4%
Nation	30.3%	24.0%	21.0%	17.0%	-13.3%

Source: California State University, Sacramento, Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy. 2006. *State of Decline? Gaps in College Access and Achievement Call for Renewed Commitment to Educating Californians.*

The loss of students at each stage of the educational transition – including high school dropouts, college-going, and college completion – means that California loses more black and Latino students proportionately than other states in the country. (See Table 2.)

Economic and Social Consequences for California's Future

We are at a crossroad today with respect to educational attainment and California's future. We face the option of either strengthening our commitment to California's historic promise of college access or we can let that commitment soften and face the consequences.

What consequences might California suffer if we fail to improve college participation and educational achievement? This section summarizes relevant research on California's projected need for an educated workforce and the consequences for failing to meet this need. In this context, Early College Commitment can serve as an important tool for improving college preparation, participation, and completion and for addressing our future workforce needs.

Declining Personal Income and State Tax Revenues:

If education attainment gaps remain at current levels for each ethnic group, California will experience the greatest decline in per capita personal income of any state in the nation between 2000 and 2020. California will see approximately \$2,475 less income per resident, which will considerably

FIGURE 3: California Stands to See the Greatest Decline in Per Capita Income with Current Levels of Educational Attainment (Projected Change* in Personal Income Per Capita, 2000-2020, in 2000 Dollars)

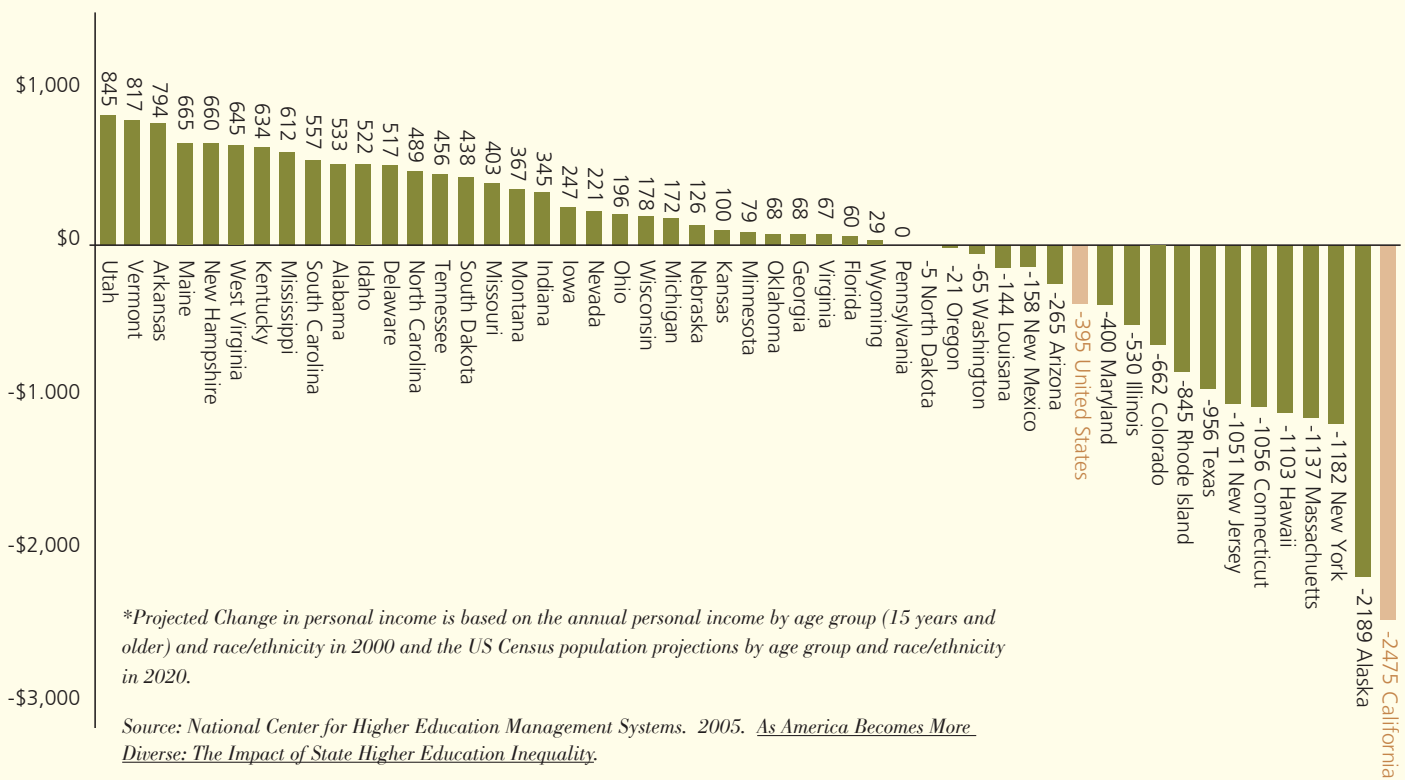
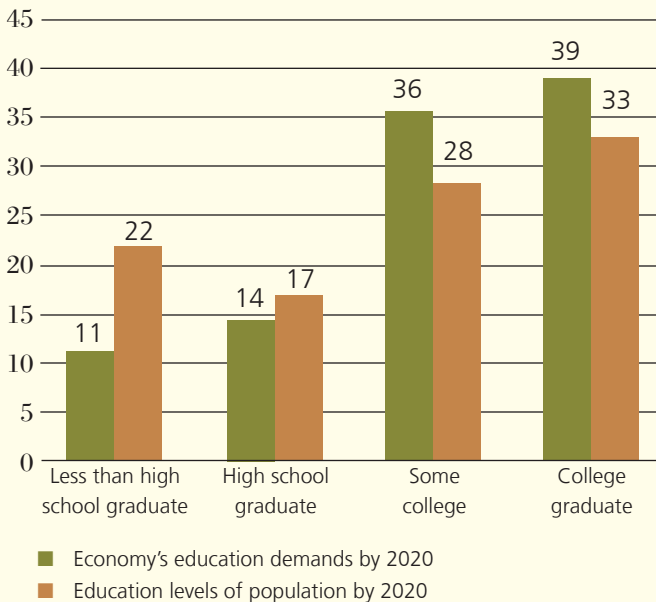


FIGURE 4: Future Demand for Educational Levels in the Economy May Outstrip Educational Attainment in the Population



If current patterns persist, the California economy will require more highly educated workers than the state may be able to provide.

Source: Public Policy Institute of California. 2005. *California 2025: Taking on the Future, Policy Brief.*

reduce our State's tax base and affect the quality of life for our residents (Kelly 2005:25; NCPPHE 2005:7). (See Figure 3.)

Projected Demand for an Educated

Workforce: The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) found in its report “California 2025: Taking on the Future,” that if educational attainment of California’s population remains static at present levels for each ethnic group, the State will face a less educated workforce in the future (Hanak and Baldassare 2005:44-6).

Furthermore, PPIC’s projections of workforce demand by industry in California show a continuation of the general shift from goods-producing to service-providing sectors and supporting occupations (Hanak and Baldassare 2005:56-8). Since service-providing sectors require a higher percent-

age of workers with higher education, demand for workers with a high school diploma or less is projected to decline while demand for workers with higher education is projected to increase (70-3). (See Figure 4.)

A study by the California Business Roundtable and the Campaign for College Opportunity projected increased workforce demand for additional higher educated workers due to the combination of industrial/occupational growth and workforce separations² will total a little over 3.2 million by 2022, with 1.8 million resulting from growth and industrial restructuring and 1.4 million from workforce separations, which includes a major wave of retirements in the highly educated Baby Boom generation (Fountain and Cosgrove 2006:11). Although the effects of this demand will be felt across all industries, the impact will be particularly felt in education, healthcare, and professional and technical services (see Figure 5). Notably, the study found that California’s economy depends heavily on industries with high educational demands, which increases the stakes for California.

Increasing the educational attainment of the workforce increases the average personal income earned, which affects State interests in two ways: it increases the tax base, and therefore tax revenue, and reduces the need for social assistance.¹ It also reduces spending on incarceration where residents with the least education are over-represented (Brady, Hout and Stiles 2005:15). (See Figure 6.)

The individual or private benefits of higher educational attainment include an improved position in the labor force, “which affects the amount that individuals work, the kind of work they do, and the amount of money they earn from work. These gains permit the accumulation of durable assets, like homes, and savings for retirement, while reducing poverty rates, use of cash assistance, and levels of household crowding” (Brady, Hout and Stiles 2005:69).

¹ “Increased education has measurable effects on the needs for means-tested transfer programs, such as the California Work Opportunities and Responsibility to Kids Program (CalWORKs), Supplementary Security Income (SSI), or poverty-related supports like Medi-Cal...” (Brady, Hout and Stiles 2005:15).

² “Workforce separations occur when people retire from working in an occupation permanently, either to work in another occupation or to retire from working altogether” (Fountain, Cosgrove and Abraham 2006:10).

Public Support for College Access

Most families want their children to have the opportunity to go to college, but think college costs more than it does and is therefore out of reach. This perception is particularly a problem depending on socioeconomic, race, and language barriers, and in California, significantly affects the Latino population and their aspirations for college.

On an even larger scale, there is widespread public support for higher education in the State. The public considers maintaining access to higher education for all aspiring students a priority even in times of budgetary crisis. Furthermore, the public believes that California’s community colleges and public universities serve important functions in workforce training and in sustaining the economic well-being of the State. In general, the public widely supports increasing the efficient use of existing resources and improving the coordination of K-12 schools and higher education institutions.

Early College Commitment proposes to address student and family concerns over higher education as well as the public’s concern for maintaining access, providing a high quality of life in the State, and the more efficient use of existing resources.

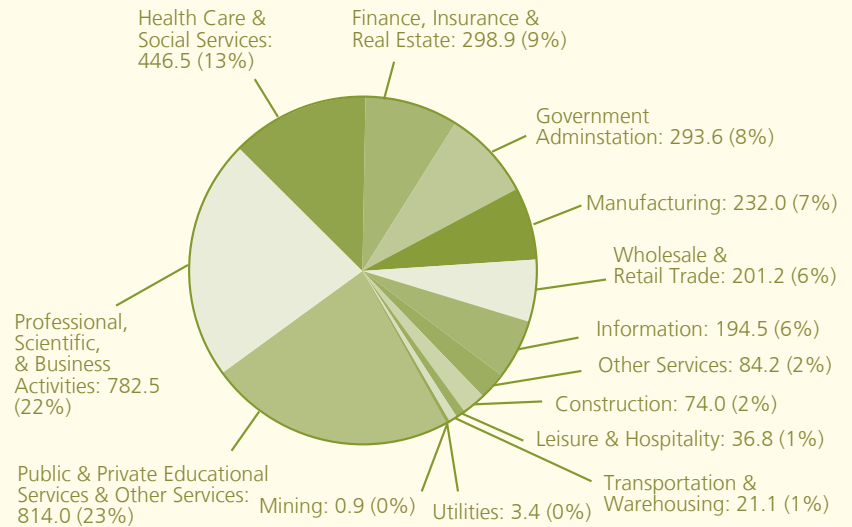
The Gap Between College Aspirations and College Knowledge:

In a 2006 poll of ethnic parents in California, a majority of parents stated they had expectations of college for their children and that the most important function of public education is to prepare their children for college (New America Media and Bendixen & Associates 2006:5).

A survey by the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute on parental “college knowledge”³ among Latino parents in Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago indicated that 96 percent wanted their children to attend college, but few had the information needed to assist in preparing their children for college (Zarate and Pachon 2006:2).

Perceptions of the nominal costs (tuition, books, etc.) and the opportunity costs (lost earnings) of attending college lead to the overestimation of the actual costs of going to college. This leads Latino

FIGURE 5: Education, Professional and Scientific, and Healthcare are Among the Industries with Greatest Number of Higher Education Employment in 2022 (In Thousands)



Source: California State University, Sacramento, Applied Research Center. 2006. *Keeping California's Edge: The Growing Demand for Highly Educated Workers.*

Note: Based on analysis of the 45 top higher educated occupations at Associate, Bachelor’s or higher levels.

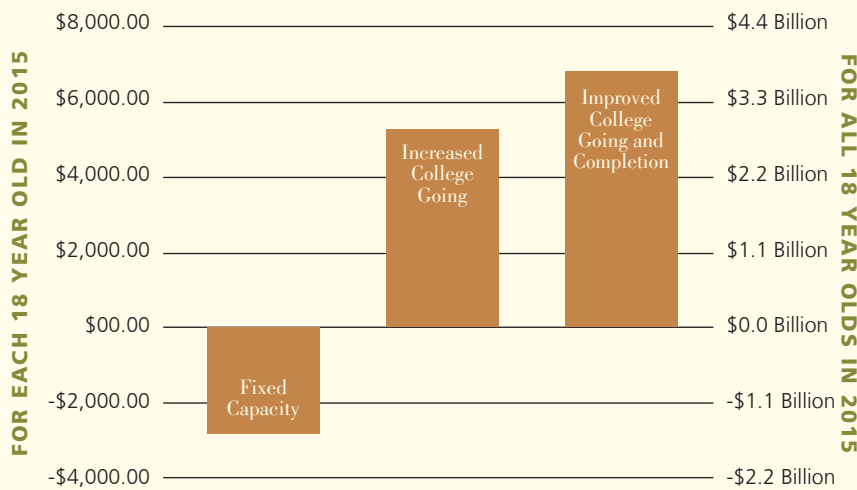
students to perceive college as “unaffordable and inaccessible.” Without full and accurate knowledge of financial aid opportunities, Latino students forfeit opportunities for higher education (Zarate and Pachon 2006:6).

A recent ethnographic study (2006) examining the college expectations and perceptions of low-income middle and high school students and their parents and guardians found that students and families view college as “a place for anyone who wants to better themselves regardless of background.”⁴ Yet, knowledge of the application process and financial aid opportunities was low and compounded by confusion of when or where to start the process. “Research confirmed a roadmap is clearly needed given their lack of knowledge, in order [to] overcome the obstacles to entering college.”

³ College knowledge is defined as knowledge of “prerequisites, paths, processes, and milestones” that prepare students for attending college (Tornatzky, Cutler and Lee 2002:3).

⁴ From an unpublished report commissioned by the Ad Council. Interviews were conducted in Los Angeles, Phoenix, and rural Arkansas.

FIGURE 6: Increased College-Going Leads to Net Lifetime Fiscal Benefits to the State



Source: University of California, Berkeley, Survey Research Center. 2005. *Return on Investment: Educational Choices and Demographic Change in California's Future*.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

"For every new dollar California invests to get more students in and through college above current levels, it will receive a net return on investment of three dollars. Put another way, the possible gains in college-going analyzed...for each annual cohort of young adults entering their college-going years could provide more than 3 billion dollars to the state in additional net tax revenues over their lifetime" (Brady, Hout and Stiles, Executive Summary, 2205:1).

Although students and families aspire to go college, they need a clearer path to help them prepare and pay for college.

Voter Support for Higher Education

in California: In a poll of California voters conducted in 2005, two-thirds of those surveyed felt California should continue to support its commitment to the Master Plan and provide access to higher education for all aspiring students. This support extended across party lines with support from Democrats and Republicans alike (Tulchin and Hathaway 2005:3).

Four out of five California voters believe "community colleges serve the entire community," and five out of six voters believe community colleges and public universities "train much of the workforce that contributes to the social and economic well-being of the state" (Tulchin and Hathaway 2005:4).

A majority of California voters polled felt the State's community colleges and public universities should increase the efficient use of existing resources (95%) and support increased state funding for higher education to educate more students (82%) (Tulchin and Hathaway 2005:4-5). Among the solutions for improving efficiency, voters strongly supported improved coordination with K-12 schools.

Recommendations for a Statewide Early College Commitment Program in California

The Campaign for College Opportunity proposes that California policymakers establish in state policy a highly visible, high impact program to provide early commitment of college opportunities to students and families in middle school and high school. This effort communicates the State's historic promise of college access made in the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education and provides a powerful new tool for schools to motivate students to stay in school, graduate from high school, take challenging coursework, and seek postsecondary opportunities if they choose to.

The objectives of the Early College Commitment proposal are the following:

- Increase high school completion rates, academic achievement and college preparation, college-going and completion rates of low-income students. The program should be evaluated based on these outcome measures.
- Motivate students to prepare for college by taking challenging coursework, including college preparatory and career technical coursework, depending on their interests in pursuing direct university admission or specific technical education programs.

- Help families understand that college is attainable and affordable, that financial aid is available, and that with the right preparation their children can go to college if they choose to.
- Provide a clear roadmap for students through middle schools, high schools, community colleges, universities, and State and federal financial aid programs, thereby improving opportunity and efficiency.
- Strengthen the State’s historic promise of college access made in the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education, and to express this commitment directly to middle and high school students and their families.
- Prepare the highly skilled workforce necessary to keep California’s economy competitive, maintain adequate income and quality of life for California residents, increase tax revenues, and provide for improved civic and democratic participation.

By making this commitment, California would promote college and career technical preparation among middle and high school students by motivating both students and families to plan for their future. It would be expected that students participating in Early College Commitment act as stewards of their own education and make efforts to gain proficiency in key subjects while attending middle and high school. Improving preparation at the middle and high school levels will reduce postsecondary education costs by decreasing the need to provide remedial courses in college and the time needed for students to graduate.

Moreover, motivating students and their families to prepare for postsecondary education would increase the number of students directly attending college following high school, a trend associated with greater college completion. Strengthening student preparation and improving college completion would enhance our State’s economic competitiveness by improving the educational quality of the workforce and raising personal incomes, potentially reversing discouraging economic trends our State presently faces (i.e. the decline in per capita in-

come, tax revenue, and workforce preparation).

Before outlining the specific elements of the proposal for Early College Commitment, it is important to understand the following tenets:

- Early College Commitment is a new tool based on pre-existing state commitments. The tool is to be used by schools, colleges, community organizations, and existing preparatory programs; it does not change eligibility for admission to any existing higher education system or create a new financial aid program.
- Early College Commitment packages existing opportunities as an early incentive for academic preparation and high school graduation. It takes programs that a student may learn about at the tail end of the high school career and informs them of those as an incentive at the front end of their middle and high school years.
- Early College Commitment is a powerful communication tool that would motivate students and families to understand that college is within reach, affordable, and that early academic preparation is critical to success.
- Early College Commitment is fiscally responsible. The commitment would minimize costs by building off existing state commitments and eligibility requirements. As more low-income students reach higher levels of educational attainment, the commitment creates potential for long-term net returns to the State due to increased earnings and tax revenues, and reduced costs of incarceration and social services.

Specific Elements of the Early College Commitment Proposal

Voluntary Tool for School Districts: While the California Early College Commitment has certain requirements for state-level education agencies to put the tool in place, use of the tool should be voluntary for school districts. However, districts that choose to take advantage of the tools provided by the program will have certain expectations of services that will need to be in place for their students.

Eligibility: Initially we propose the Early College Commitment program be prioritized to reach low-income students in the schools with greatest poverty. After the first four years of the program, the Superintendent of Public Instruction should evaluate the program and submit a set of recommendations to the legislature and the Governor for changes to the eligibility requirements.

First Tier: All 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th grade students attending public schools that serve the greatest proportion of low-income students and who attend school districts that choose to participate in the California Early College Commitment would be eligible to sign the Pledge and receive its benefits. These schools would be designated College Opportunity Zones by the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The Superintendent of Public Instruction would have the responsibility of identifying the three deciles of middle schools and high schools with the greatest levels of poverty in California, as indicated by students eligible for free or reduced price lunch or other socioeconomic indicators (see Figure 7). This approach is intended to make Early

College Commitment a tool for whole school engagement, given the high concentrations of poverty in California's poorest schools.

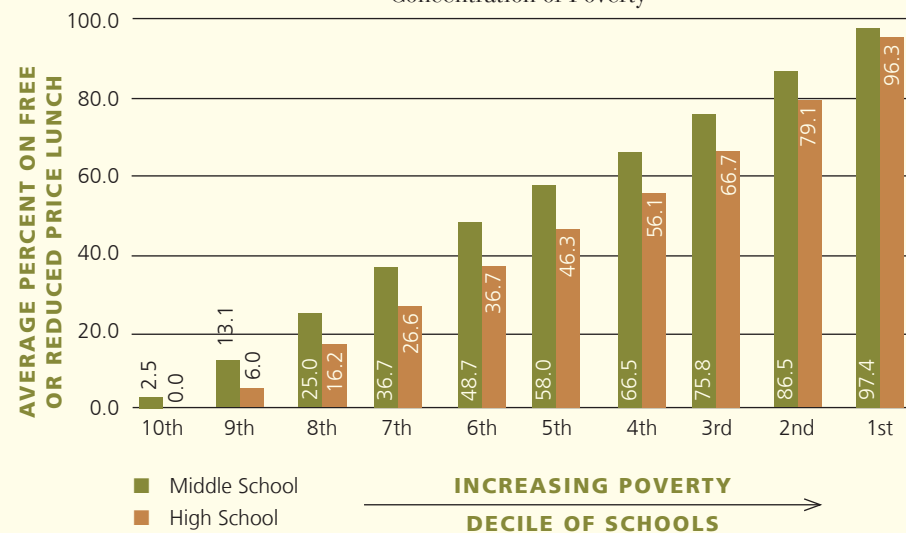
Second Tier: In participating school districts, all 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th grade students who are low-income (based on existing criteria used in schools) or who are foster youth may participate in the program. Private schools that participate in Free or Reduced Price Lunch can also make the Pledge available to their low-income students. This approach is intended to reach all low-income students.

Third Tier: The Superintendent of Public Instruction should develop a letter and materials to be provided to all middle and high schools in the state, public and private, expressing the state's commitment to access to college and describing types of colleges, financial aid programs, and available opportunities for students with grade-level information. School districts and schools should be requested to send this information to the household of each student through existing communication channels with parents. This approach is intended to reach all California households, regardless of income.

Student and Family Responsibilities: The Early College Commitment tool would give eligible 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th graders the chance to sign a pledge, called the Save Me a Spot in College Pledge declaring a commitment to finish high school and prepare for college. In signing the Pledge, eligible students commit themselves to:

1. Meet all graduation requirements to finish high school in California.
2. Take challenging coursework, which can include college preparatory and career technical classes.
3. Achieve proficiency in math and in reading and writing in English.
4. Complete a FAFSA and submit their GPA to the Student Aid Commission by March 2nd of their senior year (or earlier for private colleges).
5. Meet application and other requirements for university admission or enroll directly in community college soon after high school graduation.

FIGURE 7: Poorest Schools Have Substantial Concentration of Poverty



Campaign for College Opportunity, 2007
Source: California Department of Education

The Pledge will need to be signed by the student and their parent or legal guardian, or the appropriate person in the case of foster youth.

State Responsibilities to Eligible Students:

For students enrolled in Early College Commitment who meet their Pledge, the State in return promises:

A Spot in College:

- A guaranteed spot in a California Community College to pursue career technical education, a degree, or to transfer to four year university.
- A spot in the University of California or California State University to pursue a degree, provided the student meets the eligibility requirements set by each system and applies for admission in the 12th grade.

Financial Aid: Provide financial aid for students who are eligible and demonstrate financial need to help cover the costs of fees, books, supplies, transportation and living expenses through the following major programs:

- *Community College Early Commitment Fee Waiver.* The state should create a new guarantee that low-income students who meet the Pledge requirements will receive two years community college education tuition free, provided the student is a California resident and the student's family income should not exceed a prescribed threshold by the time they enroll in college. Students who do not qualify for the Early Commitment Fee Waiver could still apply for the regular fee waiver.
- *A guaranteed Cal Grant* provided the student meets the residency, income, asset, and GPA requirements, and completes a FAFSA and submits their GPA in the 12th grade. This grant can be used either in a public community college, public university, or at an eligible private college or technical school in California.
- *Opportunity to apply for the federal Pell Grant and other federal financial aid* which can be used at a public or private college anywhere in California and the United States provided the student

completes a FAFSA and meets the eligibility requirements.

- *Opportunity to enroll now in Scholarshare* and start investing money in a college savings plan with certain tax advantages.

The statewide Early College Commitment does not guarantee enrollment or admission to a specific campus or an individual program within a campus. The Early College Commitment does not change any existing rule for financial aid eligibility, with the exception of creating an early commitment to the Community College Fee Waiver program.

Recognition and Information: At the time of enrollment, each student will receive a Certificate of Participation in the California Early College Commitment, with his or her name, and bearing the signature of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Governor. The student will also receive a booklet providing more specific information about steps for preparation and college admissions and financial aid application requirements.

At the time of high school graduation, students who meet the requirements of the Pledge, will receive special recognition and honors, including the status of "California Early Commitment Honors Scholars," which will be noted in their high school transcript, diploma, or other method determined by the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

School Districts Responsibilities: School districts may choose to participate in the Early College Commitment on a voluntary basis. Districts who choose to participate should do so district-wide, with all eligible schools in the district participating. In collaboration with local colleges, they should provide information and services through existing programs to students throughout their middle school and high school careers.

School districts working with students who sign the Pledge would provide a "**Roadmap to College**" suite of services:

1. Transcript review and academic assessment, leading to course planning for the student and

annual reporting to the student on how they are doing relative to state standards and other benchmarks (middle school and 9th grade).

2. Information about Scholarshare (middle school and 9th grade years).
3. A visit to at least one community college (including exposure to career technical programs) and at least one 4-year college or university in 9th and 10th grades.
4. Information on university admissions tests in the 11th grade (SAT, etc.).
5. Information on university admissions and community college enrollment steps in the 12th grade.
6. Information on the FAFSA in the 12th grade and automatic verification of GPA with Student Aid Commission.

School districts would also need to record data and track students who enroll in Early College Commitment in their existing student records, enter into an inter-segmental data system such as CalPass, and provide necessary reports to the Superintendent of Public Instruction to monitor and evaluate the program.

The third tier is the part of the proposal that would be open to all schools and students in California. It will include a letter and information provided by the Superintendent of Public Instruction to all schools with accompanying information on grade-specific preparatory steps as well as additional planning information and resources.⁵ The letter would be signed by the Governor of California, Superintendent of Public Instruction, and representatives of higher education institutions. In addition to public school districts, the letter would be provided to accredited private and independent K-12 schools.

Superintendent of Public Instruction: The Superintendent of Public Instruction would have the following responsibilities:

- In developing the program, including the Pledge, letter, and supporting materials and assistance,

the Superintendent of Public Instruction should consult and work with the CCC, CSU, UC, Student Aid Commission and the Association of Independent California Colleges & Universities.

- Identify the College Opportunity Zones, that is the top 30% of middle and high schools with the highest proportion of low-income students.
- Develop the Save Me a Spot in College Pledge to be signed by eligible students and parents.
- Develop the letter and materials to be mailed to all districts.
- Develop a method to collect data from participating school districts to track enrolled students and evaluate the effectiveness of the program.
- Develop a method, in conjunction with the California Community College Chancellor, of having school districts notify community colleges of students who are pre-approved for the Fee Waiver.
- Provide resources, materials, and assistance to local educational entities working to initiate and sustain Early College Commitment programs.

Colleges and Community Organizations:

CCC, UC, CSU, independent colleges, the Student Aid Commission and its auxiliaries, and other non-profit, business, and other community organizations would be encouraged to provide support services as needed in coordination with local school districts.

Once these students enroll in community colleges and universities, these institutions would provide support services to help these students persist and complete degrees. In the California State University and the University of California, these services would be integrated through existing service delivery. In California Community Colleges, these services could include an orientation course for credit, for which the college can be funded through the existing FTES funding formula.

Supplemental Local Agreements: In addition, individual colleges or universities could enter into supplemental and more specific institutional agreements with students in local school districts

⁵ The materials could direct students and families into the existing website www.californiacolleges.edu and to their school counselor for information, as well as existing 800 numbers of the Student Aid Commission, CCC, CSU, and UC (or one central 800 number for gateway information). The mailing would also include a hand-in item that a student or parent could check off and bring to a school counselor for additional information.

that would be added separately as an attachment to the Pledge, but without a state guarantee. These supplemental agreements could include:

- A guarantee of admission to a specific university or community college program.
- Supplemental student services either in middle school and high school, or during college.
- Supplemental financial aid above and beyond existing state and federal aid.
- An earlier commitment beginning in elementary school.

Costs and Savings: We expect costs to be relatively small since the effort aims to craft a tool to be used by existing programs, rather than creating a large free-standing program. Unlike Indiana, which had to create an entirely new student services delivery system and an entirely new scholarship program, this proposal builds on existing programs.

We have identified three major costs to the State and school districts for implementing Early College Commitment:

- The first cost would be related to designing the program, identifying the eligible schools, providing tools to districts, and setting up data-tracking and evaluation systems. This is the only cost unique to this effort.
- The second cost would be the actual cost of enrolling students in Early College Commitment in middle school and high school and providing the needed support services through their middle and high school careers and in the transition to community college and university. Because use of the tool is voluntary, schools that choose to participate will need to use existing resources to meet these costs. The legislature and the Governor should also augment funding for these services through existing programs. They should also provide funding to catalyze implementation of the Early College Commitment at the local level.
- The third cost would be the future cost of increased college enrollments and financial aid.

Benefits to Students and Parents

- A clear roadmap to prepare for and pay for college.
- A guarantee for 2 years community college attendance tuition free.
- Increased chance of success in high school and college.
- Knowledge and information about a range of college opportunities.
- Improved lifetime income and economic and social opportunities.

Benefits to School Districts

- Better opportunity for their students.
- Positive incentives to help motivate students to achieve academically.
- Better coordination with community colleges, universities and financial aid.
- A baseline of state commitments, with local flexibility.

Benefits to Community Colleges and Universities

- Improved college-participation rates for underserved students.
- Improved preparation of incoming students, reducing remediation.
- Improved retention and completion rates.
- A method to coordinate with school districts as well as other segments of higher education and financial aid resources.
- Backing of legislature and Governor to make a commitment of college access and financial aid to California families.

Benefits to Taxpayers, Voters, Local Government, the Legislature and Governor

- Improved educational opportunities for California residents, particularly in underserved inland and rural regions, and among minority populations.
- Better return on our multi-billion dollar investments in K-16 education.
- Leveraging existing college and financial aid programs as a tool for high school graduation and academic achievement.
- Improved workforce preparation and economic competitiveness.
- Increased tax revenue due to increased income and reduced need for services.
- Reduced poverty and improved civic participation and social cohesion.

Benefits to Business and Industry

- Improved workforce preparation, particularly for high-demand and high-skill sectors such as healthcare, technicians, finance, science and engineering.
- Improved overall per capita income supporting economic activity.

However, the expected gains in college participation rates will occur at a time when growth in

the 18-24 population is estimated to slow, which will reduce cost pressures. By placing a ceiling on future family income on the new Early Commitment Fee Waiver, the program ensures that financial aid dollars are still going to students with financial need.

The Early College Commitment program will also result in savings to the State. Improving the preparation of students will reduce the need for remediation in college and will help students make progress to their degrees in a more timely fashion. In addition, because the program leverages the State's major postsecondary education opportunities into one commitment made to students, it will improve coordination and efficiency among K-12, financial aid, and postsecondary institutions. Finally, by improving educational attainment, Early College Commitment will increase tax revenues through greater income and reduced costs for social services and incarceration.

Models of Early Commitment

The idea behind Early College Commitment is well-tested. What follows are summaries of a number of inspiring and successful examples of similar programs in California and the nation.

The Early College Commitment proposal is most closely modeled after the Twenty-first Century Scholars program in Indiana. Twenty-first Century Scholars provides a strong example of what a statewide commitment to early college access and financial aid can achieve in improving college-going rates for low-income students.

Within California there are several ongoing programs that model the theme of providing early commitment to college access at a particular campus. Specific examples include the Compact for Success between San Diego State University and Sweetwater Union High School District; Reservation for College administered by UC Davis; and Passport to College at Riverside Community College and San Joaquin Delta College.

Remarkably, even private citizens in California rec-

ognize the importance of early college commitment. One inspiring example is that of Oral Lee Brown, an Oakland realtor who made and kept such a promise to low-income students in Oakland.

All of these examples prove that early college commitment can serve as an essential tool to improving college access, especially for low-income students, and that early college commitment can be sustained on a statewide scale.

Twenty-first Century Scholars (Indiana):

Started in 1990 to better Indiana's direct college-going rates and to create equal socioeconomic opportunities for college attainment, the Twenty-first Century Scholars⁶ program has improved key educational measures for low-income students. The statewide program has increased the rates at which low-income students apply for financial aid and enroll in college; evened out the rate of degree attainment between those who rely on financial aid and those who do not; and has increased persistence to degree of low-income scholars compared to low-income non-scholars in the attainment of two-year degrees. The program has also helped to improve the state's national ranking in the percentage of high school graduates enrolling in college directly following high school from 40th in 1986 to 9th in 2002 (St. John, Gross, Musoba, and Chung 2005).

Low-income students who enroll in the Twenty-first Century Scholars program sign a pledge in the 7th or 8th grade to complete high school, maintain a 2.0 grade-point average or better, stay away from drugs and crime, submit an affirmation of their pledge during their senior year, apply for financial aid, and enroll in college full-time within two years of graduating from high school. The program uses the existing Free or Reduced Price Lunch status to determine eligibility. Once enrolled in the program, students remain eligible even if family income changes by the time of college enrollment. In honoring students' pledges, the state promises four years of financial aid equal to tuition at a public university or the equivalent award at a private university in Indiana, and a variety of support services to

both students and parents as students move through middle and high school years.

Compact for Success: The Compact for Success⁷ is a partnership founded in 1998 between San Diego State University and Sweetwater Unified School District to improve college access and success. The Compact promises admission to San Diego State to all students who meet educational benchmarks throughout middle and high school. The Compact provides “roadmaps” describing college requirements and academic standards step-by-step (7th grade through 12th grade) to students and parents, coordinates annual fieldtrips to San Diego State for 7th and 10th graders, and provides college-prep curriculum aids to district schools.

Once Compact students are enrolled at San Diego State, qualified “Compact Scholars” engage in programs and activities that support academic success and student involvement at the university (Speciale and Nava 2006; Hoskins 2006). Some Compact students also receive scholarships from the Sweetwater Education Foundation⁸, a nonprofit community organization committed to raising scholarship funds from private donors.

In 2004, the Compact for Success received the Golden Bell Award from the California School Boards Association for most outstanding instructional program. A recent evaluation of the program has shown dramatic improvements in Sweetwater students being prepared for and admitted to San Diego State.

Passport to College: Passport to College⁹ is a program that started at Riverside Community College and was replicated at San Joaquin Delta College. Riverside made a commitment of support services and financial aid equal to two years tuition to fifth graders expected to enter college in 2004. During the current academic year (2006-07), San Joaquin Delta College has made the same commitment to fifth graders in its service area, and so far over 7,000 students and parents have signed the agreement between their school district and San Joa-

quin Delta College. The goals of Passport to College are to promote a college-going culture and increase college participation for students in these cohorts. The program requires both students and parents to participate in program events, and parents to attend yearly parent-teacher meetings. The program recognizes that college participation requires early commitment to college: “To get to college in the first place, students need to start making the right decisions when they are young” (Johnson 2006).

Reservation for College: Reservation for College¹⁰ is a collaborative public/private partnership between UC Davis, Pacific Gas & Electric, and several school districts in Sacramento and Yolo Counties. As a K-12 academic preparation program based out of UC Davis, Reservation for College focuses on preparing underprivileged students and their families for higher education beginning in the 4th grade and through high school. In their senior year, at the end of the ninth year in the program, enrolled students who graduate from local Reservation for College high schools and who are admitted to UC Davis receive a grant toward the costs of their undergraduate education (Lapin 1999; Wright 1999).

The program also develops college preparatory materials to use in classroom instruction to prepare students for success in college. Parents are also instructed on how to negotiate college preparation and access, and are connected with other parents from the same economic or ethnic backgrounds who can give firsthand advice and support about sending their children to college (Easley 2002; Paul 2001).

Oral Lee Brown Foundation: Oral Lee Brown¹¹ is an Oakland realtor who in 1987 made a commitment to “giving something back” to her impoverished neighborhood and fulfilled this commitment by adopting the first grade class at Brookfield Elementary School. Brown promised this class that if they stayed in school, she would put them through college. In addition to promising to support their college aspirations, Brown also mentored the children, tracked their attendance, and provided other assistance to the children and families when needed. Of

⁷ For more information on the Compact for Success, see: <http://coe.sdsu.edu/compact/>.

⁸ For more information on the Sweetwater Education Foundation, see: <http://sweetwatereducationfoundation.org/>.

⁹ For more information on Passport to College, see: <http://www.rcc.edu/supporters/passport.cfm>.

¹⁰ For more information on Reservation for College, see: <http://sup.ucdavis.edu/rfc.htm>.

¹¹ For more information on the Oral Lee Brown Foundation, see: http://www.localcommunities.org/servlet/c_ProcServ/dbpage=page&GID=01002011550945281031790195&PG=0137001151062214422333721.

the original 23 students Brown made this promise to, 19 went to a four-year college and the rest went to community college or pursued vocational studies (Giemer 2006).¹²

Brown asserts, “I feel the students must be given the financial assistance and inspiration to continue their education. If these children become successful, then my life will have been a success” (Oral Lee Brown Foundation website). Today, the Oral Lee Brown Foundation continues to adopt a new class every four years. Brown cites two factors as critical to the success of these students: a focus on preparation for college and a commitment to financial aid (Brown 2007).

California’s Existing Commitments

The Early College Commitment is based on California’s existing commitments to college access – as established in the Master Plan for Higher Education – including providing public access to California Community Colleges, California State University, and the University of California, as well as ensuring access to various sources of financial assistance. The State also benefits from educational opportunities provided by private colleges, where low-income students can pursue their education with state-supported financial aid.

In California, the public systems of higher education are differentiated under the Master Plan in several important ways; they differ in how they are governed, function, and by which students they admit. Most importantly, the Master Plan established the principle of universal access to public higher education in California.¹³ By establishing the CCC, CSU, and UC as systems restricted by the educational services they render and by the students they seek to admit, California’s public higher education system is intended to have the capacity to grant access to anyone with an interest in pursuing higher education.

Higher Education System: The following summarizes some key characteristics of higher education in California as established by the Master Plan:

- **California Community Colleges:** The CCC provide open access to higher education in the State and will admit anyone who desires to attend and who can benefit from instruction. They prepare students to transfer to a four-year university, grant associate and vocational degrees, provide workforce training and basic skills education, and in some cases instruction leading to the GED. With the lowest fees of any community college system in the country, and a generous fee waiver program, state policy has intended for this system to be accessible to all residents.
- **California State University:** The primary educational function of the CSU is undergraduate education and graduate education leading to the master’s degree. CSU also provides professional and teacher education, and grants limited doctorate degrees jointly with the UC. CSU is to admit its students from the top one-third of graduating¹⁴ high school seniors, and to maintain a lower division to upper division ratio of 40:60 by admitting transfer students from CCC.¹⁵
- **University of California:** The UC is the primary academic research institution, and provides undergraduate, graduate, and professional education and degrees. UC is to admit the top one-eighth of graduating high school seniors, and like the CSU, must also maintain a lower division to upper division ratio of 40:60 by admitting transfer students.¹⁶
- **Private and Independent Colleges:** California benefits from an array of private colleges, universities, and technical schools which are operated independently of the State, yet provide educational opportunities for California residents. California students may use CalGrants and federal financial aid at qualified institutions.

¹² With the exception of one student who passed away.
¹³ For summaries of the Master Plan, see University of California Office of the President, Department of Academic Initiatives at <http://www.ucop.edu/acadinit/mastplan/> and the UC Berkeley’s Center for the Studies in Higher Education at http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/uchistory/archives_exhibits/masterplan/.

¹⁴ To be college-ready, a graduating high school senior must not only meet the GPA requirement for admission into CSU or UC (top 1/3 or top 1/8 of statewide graduating class), but they must also complete the A-G curriculum, take admissions tests, and apply on time.

¹⁵ University of California Office of the President, Department of Academic Initiatives: <http://www.ucop.edu/acadinit/mastplan/mpsummary.htm>.

¹⁶ University of California Office of the President, Department of Academic Initiatives: <http://www.ucop.edu/acadinit/mastplan/mpsummary.htm>.

Financial Aid: The Master Plan also established provisions for financial aid, which have since been updated and expanded, notably through the Cal Grant administered by the Student Aid Commission.

- **Cal Grant:** The Cal Grant gives low-income students the means for attending the higher education institution of their choice. As an entitlement grant for qualified high school seniors, eligibility is determined by an income and asset formula and by the student's GPA. Students must apply on time, by March 2nd of their senior year, which includes completing the FAFSA and submitting formal verification of their GPA. Other parts of the Cal Grant program are competitive, with a limited number of scholarships regardless of the number of eligible applicants.
- **Fee Waivers and Campus Grants:** In addition to the Cal Grant, students in California have other opportunities to access financial aid. The Board of Governors Fee Waiver (BOGW) is a CCC grant that pays a student's fees and is based on economic need. The waiver is intended to be accessible, with students having the option to complete a simplified form for quick verification of eligibility or the FAFSA. The CSU and UC administer campus-based grant programs funded by State and student fee revenues. Private colleges provide additional financial aid to their students using campus resources.
- **Federal Student Aid:** Federal loan and grant programs include a variety of financing options that students can access such as the Stafford, Perkins, and PLUS loans, federal work-study, and, perhaps most importantly, the Pell Grant, the federal entitlement grant program. In addition, federal tax laws provide tax credits for education costs and permit savings plans, called "529 plans" such as California's Scholarshare, that allow families to invest for college with certain tax advantages.

However, recent research by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education documents the continued underutilization of Pell Grants by students in the California Community Colleges, despite recent improvements (Zumeta and Frankle 2007, study forthcoming). A contributing factor appears to be that many high school graduates who are not bound for selective colleges and universities are not completing financial aid applications as seniors. Other students delay college attendance to work, making their incomes too high for aid eligibility. Equitable access to financial aid is an increasing concern, and attention to financial aid policy is mounting in research and higher education policy discourse.

Academic Preparation Programs: Lastly, there are state, school, and community programs in California that aim to assist students with preparation for college. Programs such as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)¹⁷; Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA)¹⁸; California Student Opportunity and Access Program (Cal-SOAP)¹⁹; and the Puente Project²⁰ work to help educationally disadvantaged students prepare for, gain access to, and succeed in college. The recently adopted CSU Early Assessment Program is an important innovation that is helping align high school and college standards and helping high school seniors become ready for college-level work, thereby seeking to reduce remediation and improve success.

In addition, the Governor and legislature have recently increased the funding for counselors in middle schools and high schools, as well as funding to better align high school and community college career technical education programs. In the 2006-2007 budget, the State increased funding for counselors by \$200 million, a major infusion of state support.

Building on these existing major commitments, Early College Commitment packages these opportunities as a commitment to low-income students beginning in middle school.

¹⁷ For more information on AVID, see: <http://www.avidonline.org/> or <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/ps/avidgen.asp>.

¹⁸ For more information on MESA, see: <http://www.ucop.edu/mesa/home.html>.

¹⁹ For more information on Cal-SOAP, see: <http://www/csac.ca.gov/doc.asp?id=77>.

²⁰ For more information on Puente Project, see: <http://www.puente.net/>.

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About this Report

This report was based on an extensive literature review of recent studies on educational attainment, workforce preparation, and model programs. It also included interviews with staff of model programs in California, as well as on-site interviews with staff and public officials involved in the Indiana 21st Century Scholars Program. The report includes new analysis of the distribution of low-income students in California. Finally, the recommendations for the Early College Commitment proposal were informed by consultation with over 100 education and public policy experts in the fall of 2006 and early 2007.

The report was written by Marcia Cosgrove, Research and Policy Associate, and Abdi Soltani, Executive Director, Campaign for College Opportunity.

About the Campaign for College Opportunity

The Campaign for College Opportunity is a California non-profit organization solely devoted to ensuring that the next generation of college-age students has the change to go to college as promised by the Master Plan for Higher Education.

The co-founders of the Campaign are the California Business Roundtable, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and the Community College League of California. The Campaign gratefully acknowledges the many individuals, institutions, and foundations whose participation and financial contributions make our work possible.

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