A young woman with dark hair, wearing a purple long-sleeved shirt and a light blue skirt, is the central focus. She is looking down at two sheets of paper she is holding. She has a blue and black backpack. In the background, a large group of diverse students is walking on a paved path, some carrying backpacks. The scene is outdoors, likely on a college campus, with a stone wall visible on the left. The lighting is bright, suggesting daytime.

# **Increasing College Access and Completion in California**

*Education Experts Discuss a Way Forward*

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS ■ SPRING/SUMMER 2010

## Increasing College Access and Completion in California *Education Experts Discuss a Way Forward*

CALIFORNIA'S public colleges and universities have long been a centerpiece of the state's economic and social vitality, and a model for public systems across the globe. Yet, for the first time in recent memory, the ability of the nation's largest and most accessible public higher education system to serve California's needs in the future is uncertain.

In April 2010, The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation and College Access Foundation of California convened a group of experts from diverse segments of California's education community to discuss California's public higher education system and possible solutions to its twin challenges: increasing access and completion across its public campuses.

In the next decade, two-thirds of all jobs created in California will require some form of post-secondary credential. The economic recession has boosted college enrollment nationwide in recent years, including a 21 percent increase in freshmen enrollment in California in 2008, according to the Department of Education. Yet California still lags most states in college access: slightly more than 50 percent of the state's high school graduates ages 18–24 go directly to college, ranking California 40th in the nation.

Equally important, the percentage of California students completing college is inadequate to satisfy the state's employment needs: once in college, only six out of 10 students finish their college degree within six years. At community colleges, where more than two-thirds of California students enroll, fewer than three in 10 students receive a certificate or associate's

degree or transfer to a four-year institution. If current trends continue, California will be one million short of the number of college graduates that its businesses and employers will require in 2025.

While the state's economic woes were front and center of the group's discussion, experts agreed that policymakers and education leaders must grapple with a host of other issues to improve public higher education in the years to come—including articulating clear goals for how the public system should perform, better connecting limited state resources to desired goals for each of the system's three branches, and increasing public understanding of the importance of California's public colleges and universities to the state's long-term health.

*California still lags most states in college access: slightly more than 50 percent of the state's high school graduates ages 18–24 go directly to college, ranking California 40th in the nation.*

Reinforcing the notion that California can tackle its higher education dilemma, participants also heard from education officials from Indiana and Long Beach, California, who have taken innovative approaches to addressing access and completion gaps in their respective communities.

## The Indiana Model

**C**HERYL ORR, a former Indiana education official and a senior vice president at Complete College America, says that many of the challenges faced by Indiana in the 1980s mirror those in California today. “Back in the 80s, we did not have a plan. We did not have any money. We did not have any leadership. We didn’t have partners or stakeholders. We didn’t have a public that believed we had a problem.”

At the time, fewer than 39 percent of Indiana students were going to college after high school. With an economy still offering young people decent-paying but low-skilled jobs, Orr adds that persuading students’ families and educators that a college education would be necessary in the future was a big challenge.



### CALIFORNIA’S POOR RECORD ON ACCESS AND COMPLETION

- ≈ *Just over 50 percent of high school students go directly to college*
- ≈ *Six in 10 graduate college in six years*
- ≈ *Three in 10 complete community college*

*In 1994, the state adopted a more rigorous K-12 curriculum, known as Indiana Core 40, to better connect coursework to college requirements. Within 10 years, nearly 70 percent of Indiana students participated in Core 40 and its honors program.*

Despite the hurdles, business, higher education and K-12 leaders came together to spearhead several initiatives centered on encouraging and preparing Indiana’s high school students to attend college, and ensuring they succeed once enrolled in school.

In 1994, the state adopted a more rigorous K-12 curriculum, known as Indiana Core 40, to better connect coursework to college requirements. Within 10 years, nearly 70 percent of Indiana students participated in Core 40 and its honors program.

The state also began offering free PSAT and advanced placement exams, which nearly doubled the number of Indiana students taking AP exams in just six years. College and career information was provided to all students, and a scholarship program was created to reduce the financial barriers for low-income students.

With its success in promoting college opportunity, Orr notes that Indiana is now focused squarely on college completion—its Commission for Higher Education has set a goal of graduating 10,000 more students every year.

While the economic downturn has been challenging, Orr notes that the state’s emphasis on “funding what we want to see accomplished” has meant that even in years of falling revenues, cuts are proposed based on a clear set of priorities.

## Long Beach's Culture of Collaboration

**E**LOY ORTIZ OAKLEY, superintendent of Long Beach City College, wants to better prepare his students to succeed in the workforce and in four-year institutions, noting that only 14 percent of African-American and 18 percent of Latino students complete their higher education. “There’s no point in a community college wishing it had better students,” Oakley said. “We’re here to prepare those we do have to achieve their educational goals.”

Unfortunately, K-12 districts, community colleges and the state universities—not to mention the University of California system—tend to work in silos, Oakley said, and common definitions of college-readiness do not exist.

This disconnect and its negative impact on students prompted the leaders of Long Beach’s public education branches to foster greater local collaboration.

The collaboration begins at the Unified School District, where its College Promise initiative works to encourage higher education aspirations as early as possible. All fourth-graders in the district—currently 6,000 students from 21 schools—make a half-day visit to Long Beach City College with their parents, including in-class preparation before and follow up after their visits. Students visit Cal State Long Beach the following year.

*“There’s no point in a community college wishing it had better students,” Oakley said. “We’re here to prepare those we do have to achieve their educational goals.”*

“Many of our parents didn’t go to college, and they don’t think it’s possible,” said Christopher Steinhauser, superintendent of Long Beach USD. “But those visits can change their minds.”

“Last year, 74 percent of [our] kids went to college—757 different institutions,” he added, “and we’re tracking how many are finishing in four, five and six years.”

Cal State University Long Beach plays an equally vital role in the partnership. University president F. King Alexander said, “Our entire job is to work with the public schools. Seventy percent of [Long Beach Unified’s] teachers and a large portion of its superintendents come from us. We’re very much a part of the public school system, and everyone on my campus believes that if we don’t help the public schools, we’ll deal with the aftermath.”

He noted that Long Beach Unified is the only school district to mandate Early Assessment Program testing for all its high school juniors, and the district has designed ways to have classes ready for students who test poorly. “We’re working closely with them on that,” Alexander said, “because their people are our people. It’s an integrated process.” New teachers are evaluated in 14 proficiency categories, and the university takes a strong role in bringing them back to campus to address weak areas.

This young collaboration has already yielded important results, including sizeable increases in the number of high school graduates who enroll directly in college, and double the number of Long Beach students persisting at community colleges versus students from other districts.

Alexander characterized Long Beach as “the largest small town in the country.” “We experiment with ideas,” he said of his partnership with Oakley and Steinhauser. “Some work, some don’t, but we’re not afraid to try. It’s definitely a collective effort.”

## The Way Forward for California

**T**HE LESSONS OFFERED by educators in Indiana and Long Beach sparked a rich discussion among participants of the opportunities and barriers to promoting greater college access and success within California's higher education institutions.

Meeting participants agreed that California already has several key building blocks in place to increase post-secondary access and success. For example, they noted the longstanding agreement about what constitutes college preparatory coursework, and that all three branches of the state's higher education system are coming to view the state's Early Assessment Program as an indicator of college readiness in California.

They added that California's Cal-PASS system provides decision makers with data to align the critical connection between the state's K-12 and higher education systems. They also highlighted California's affordable and accessible community college system as invaluable to addressing the state's growing higher education needs.

*Meeting participants agreed that California already has several key building blocks in place to increase post-secondary access and success.*

California falls short in defining tangible ways to foster greater college completion. As one participant noted, "We do a wonderful job of access. We do a terrible job of completion. We are at a crossroads in California and we need to choose the right path. We need to do a better job preparing [students] to succeed."

Experts pointed to several places within the education system that must be improved to increase college completion, including creating

a smoother transfer path for students between post-secondary institutions, and tying the financing of institutions in K-12 and post-secondary education more closely to student success.

Participants also agreed that student support must be strengthened, including more systemized support for students once they enter college and better early intervention efforts for students who are in danger of failing.

Some noted that state policy provides no incentive for schools or colleges to make sure that students complete post-secondary education. K-12 districts tout their college-going rate and colleges emphasize their access, but there are no incentives for them to get students through to graduation.



### CALIFORNIA NEEDS A PLAN

- ≈ *Clear goals for post-secondary access and completion*
- ≈ *Framework for aligning policies and resources with attainment goals*
- ≈ *Clear and consistent public message on college success*

## A Plan as a First Step

ULTIMATELY, meeting participants cited the need for a clear state plan as a necessary first step to creating any meaningful change within California’s higher education system. Such a plan needs to outline clear goals for post-secondary attainment, provide a framework for aligning policies with those goals, and give students, parents and educators a clear and consistent message about what it takes for students to succeed in college.

As a college president remarked, “We need to be more focused. We need to do it for the students and for the economy both.”

A foundation leader added, “We are at a point where we ought to be thinking and talking about solutions. There is a lot of innovation and good things happening. But there isn’t a good over-arching state understanding of how it needs to go forward.”



### TAKEAWAY MESSAGES

- ≈ *Collaboration among the K-12 and higher education systems is essential to increasing college access and completion.*
- ≈ *Other states have moved the needle on these challenges through persistent and focused leadership and a statewide plan.*
- ≈ *California is ahead of the game with A-G requirements and tools such as the Early Assessment Program and California Partnership for Achieving Student Success, which can accelerate progress.*

# Increasing College Access and Success: What Will It Take for California to Succeed?

## Meeting Participants

### Thomas Ahn

Executive Director  
*First Graduate*

### F. King Alexander

President  
*California State University  
Long Beach*

### Isidro Armenta

Co-President  
*South Central Scholars  
Alumni Network*

### Parker Blackman

Chief Operating Officer  
*Fenton Communications*

### Mario DeAnda

Director of Postsecondary  
Planning/Coordinator of  
New School Development  
*Big Picture Learning*

### Alison DeLuca

Executive Director  
*SoCal CAN (Southern  
California College Access  
Network)*

### Penny Edgert

Executive Director  
*California Education  
Round Table*

### Christopher Edley

Dean  
*Boalt Hall School of Law*

### Camille Esch

Director, California  
Education Program  
*New America Foundation*

### William Franklin

Associate Vice President,  
Student Success Services  
Enrollment Management  
& Student Affairs  
*California State University,  
Dominguez Hills*

### Theresa García

Executive Director  
*California State Board  
of Education*

### Liz Guillen

Director of Legislative &  
Community Affairs  
*Public Advocates*

### Jordan Horowitz

Senior Director for  
Special Projects  
*Cal-PASS (California  
Partnership for Achieving  
Student Success)*

### Katheryn Horton

Program Manager  
*Sonoma County  
College Promise*

### Nick Kislinger

Chief of Staff  
*California State Office of  
the Secretary of Education*

### Ellen Kelm

Assistant to the Director  
*Sonoma County  
College Promise*

### Jeremy Lahoud

Executive Director  
*Californians for Justice*

### Sara Lundquist

Vice President, Student  
Services  
*Santa Ana College*

### Julie Mendoza

Southern California  
Director  
*ARCHES (Alliance for  
Regional Collaboration  
to Heighten Educational  
Success) Collaborative*

### Paul Navarro

Deputy Legislative  
Secretary, Education  
*Office of the Governor*

### Cheryl Orr

Senior Vice President  
*Complete College America*

### Eloy Ortiz Oakley

Superintendent-President  
*Long Beach City College*

### Sonia Ortiz-Mercado

Matriculation & Early  
Assessment Program  
Coordinator  
*California Community  
Colleges*

### David Plank

Executive Director  
*PACE (Policy Analysis for  
California Education)*

### Anne Price

Director, Community  
College Access and  
Equity Initiative  
*California Tomorrow*

### Ford Roosevelt

President & CEO  
*Project GRAD Los Angeles  
(Graduation Really  
Achieves Dreams)*

### D'Artagnan Scorza

Director  
*Social Justice  
Learning Institute  
University of California  
Regent Emeritus*

### Sylvia Scott-Hayes

Member, Board of Trustees  
*Los Angeles Community  
College District*

### Michele Siquieros

Executive Director  
*Campaign for College  
Opportunity*

### Christopher Steinhauser

Superintendent  
*Long Beach Unified  
School District*

### Amy Supinger

Consultant  
*Supinger Strategies*

### Mark W. Taylor

Director of Community  
& Governmental  
Relations  
*Long Beach  
City College*

## The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation

### Martin H. Blank Jr.

COO & Director

### Melissa Bordy

Advisory Board Member

### Tessa Carmen De Roy

Consultant, College  
Access & Success

### Robbie Diamond

Administrator

### Evelyn Hughes

Recorder

### Janis Minton

Senior Advisor

### Sean Ostrovsky

Program & Grants  
Manager

### Tanya Schevitz

Freelance Writer

## College Access Foundation of California

### Julia Lopez

President & CEO

### Jay Sherwin

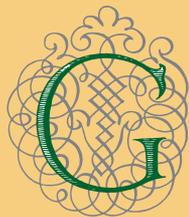
Vice President  
for Programs

## About The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation

**T**HE ROSALINDE AND ARTHUR GILBERT FOUNDATION is committed to providing and connecting resources to organizations that promote and improve health, education, economic and cultural opportunities to communities in California and Israel. The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation supports:

- ≈ *College access and completion for youth from greater Los Angeles*
- ≈ *Education, economic development, and scientific research in Israel*
- ≈ *Diabetes prevention and Alzheimer's Disease research & caregiver support*
- ≈ *Cultural organizations and arts education programs in Greater Los Angeles*
- ≈ *Jewish organizations in Greater Los Angeles*
- ≈ *Programs at UC Berkeley and UCLA that intersect with the Foundation's mission and objectives*

To leverage its commitments, The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation partners with other funders, government agencies, and local and international philanthropists.



THE ROSALINDE AND ARTHUR GILBERT FOUNDATION  
2730 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 301  
Santa Monica, CA 90403  
Telephone: 310.449.4500  
[www.thegilbertfoundation.org](http://www.thegilbertfoundation.org)

## About College Access Foundation of California

**C**OLLEGE ACCESS FOUNDATION OF CALIFORNIA helps California students who have significant financial need attend college. The foundation makes grants to community organizations and programs that offer advice and academic support to students, and use foundation dollars to award college scholarships.

Since its inception in 2005, the foundation has made over \$48 million in grants to more than 100 community organizations and education programs throughout California. These organizations in turn have awarded over 20,000 scholarships to low-income and first-generation students.

The foundation is also supporting efforts to determine how scholarships can encourage persistence and graduation among college students, and is fostering a learning community of scholarship providers and others to share best practices in scholarship giving and support to students.



COLLEGE ACCESS  
FOUNDATION  
*of California*

*Opportunities for Students*

COLLEGE ACCESS FOUNDATION OF CALIFORNIA  
One Front Street, Suite 1325  
San Francisco, CA 94111  
Telephone: 415.287.1800  
[www.collegeaccessfoundation.org](http://www.collegeaccessfoundation.org)