

Policy Considerations for Establishing A College Promise

A policy paper on how communities across California can increase access, improve student success, and strengthen the economy through proven community-based reforms to develop a Promise students and families can trust

Authored by the Long Beach College Promise Partners

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Contents

Contact Information	3
Introduction	4
Requisite Principles and Elements	5
Additional Considerations for Policy Makers	8

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Dear Friend,

On behalf of the Long Beach College Promise, we are pleased to distribute these policy recommendations aimed at increasing college attendance and completion across California. As noted by America's College Promise and other regional and state efforts, Long Beach is a model for creating partnerships and eliminating barriers in order to achieve student success. We have come a long way in creating more seamless transitions and more logical pathways for students. Despite these advancements, both locally and throughout California, we have much more work to do so that every student can complete college, enter a career of their choice, and live a healthier life.

In recent years there have been multiple institutional and legislative proposals to create new College Promises. We are encouraged by statewide efforts such as the Tennessee Promise, public-private partnerships like those in Richmond and Detroit, and developing initiatives in Fresno, Los Angeles, and Santa Ana. We are also encouraged by well-intentioned legislators who have proposed measures to create reforms that incentivize institutional partnerships, eliminate financial barriers, or prioritize resources for Career Technical Education and Workforce Development.

As policy makers continue to seek reforms under the umbrella of College Promises, we argue for the inclusion of certain principles and key elements that any successful initiative should embody. Through institutional collaboration, system alignment, structured educational pathways, elimination of traditional barriers, and community engagement, all students can have the opportunity to attend and complete college while benefitting their regional and state economy.

We look forward to discussing these policy considerations with policy makers and educational leaders throughout California. In closing, we want to thank key staff who coordinated the development of this policy paper and who assist in the success of the Long Beach College Promise through their daily work. They include Terri Carbaugh at California State University Long Beach and Miles J. Nevin at Long Beach City College.

Sincerely,



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Requisite Principles and Elements for a Successful College Promise

Primary Objective

Through institutional collaboration, system alignment, structured educational pathways, elimination of traditional barriers, and community-wide engagement, all students can have the opportunity to attend and complete college while directly benefitting the regional and state workforce and economy.

Guiding Policy Principles

- **Universal Participation**

College Promise initiatives have universal impact, meaning all students are automatically beneficiaries of the initiative regardless of socioeconomic status. In other words, a student would need to opt out of a Promise initiative instead of opting in. This is a critical principle that will guide College Promise efforts, since the goal is to raise educational attainment rates across higher education institutions and across diverse communities.ⁱ

- **Institutional Commitment and Collaboration**

A foundational principle to the success of College Promise initiatives is that key stakeholders are engaged early and maintain collaboration long-term. This buy-in is achieved through formal agreements between institutions, direct communication among institutional leaders, and agreement on clear metrics and benchmarks.

- **Data Sharing**

Creating longitudinal data sharing across K-12, community college, and CSU is vital to any College Promise partnership as it facilitates better understanding of students matriculating through the K-12 - CSU pipeline.ⁱⁱ Better understanding of the effectiveness and scalability of interventions on improving adult education attainment in communities and regions will also strengthen partnerships. Data sharing is a key component of any long-term efforts to systemically improve outcomes for students.

- **Professional Development and Curriculum Alignment**

In order for Promise initiatives to thrive it is important for faculty and key education leaders to participate in professional development activities that improve coordination, alignment, and trust between faculty and key administrative staff. Policy makers may consider ways to encourage this type of human resources alignment and trust building.

- **Collaboration Between California State University (CSU) Colleges of Education and Local School Districts**

Since the majority of K-12 teachers in California receive some or all of their training from The CSU, policy makers may consider ways to increase the data sharing and collaboration between those colleges of education and local school districtsⁱⁱⁱ. Effective collaboration will lead to improved teaching skills, greater alignment between the production of teaching credentials and the discipline-specific shortages that exist, and improved implementation of the career pathways and the Common Core.

- **Commitments by All Stakeholders**

The very premise of a “promise” is that stakeholders are taking action and accepting responsibility for increasing educational attainment rates. Therefore, College Promise initiatives require a commitment from all stakeholders who are involved. For example, students and families in elementary school could pledge to meet preparation requirements and enroll in college; educational institutions could reform curriculum and identify financial support; and local municipalities could strengthen students’ work-based experiences by facilitating additional internships and job opportunities.

- **Local Metrics and Commitments**

Policy makers may consider encouraging the establishment and tracking of local metrics to create focus on increasing education attainment in local communities. This is a key element of accountability and efficiency that can contribute to the success of these initiatives.^{iv}

- **System Alignment**

There are multiple opportunities for improved alignment that, if developed, can increase access to community college, decrease time to completion, and generally achieve efficiencies within educational pathways. Institutions can align curriculum and provide student support services across institutional boundaries in order to improve seamless and successful transitions^v.

- **Structured Pathways**

At the heart of any College Promise initiative is increasing access to and success in higher education. Building effective partnerships in communities and regions between public education institutions is key to blurring the lines between the key education transition points for students. Encouraging school districts, community colleges, and the state universities in regions to establish formal partnerships that establish as outcomes the creation of college and career pathways for students is a vital element of a “Promise.” Legislators might consider policies that encourage and reward such effective partnerships.

Efforts such as the *Career Pathways Trust*^{vi} and the *Awards for Innovation in Higher Education*^{vii} have provided examples of how to encourage partnerships for the purpose of improving college and career readiness and time to degree outcomes. We believe that establishing formal agreements or Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) is helpful at identifying the key student success metrics that local communities and regions can focus on to improve college credential attainment and close achievement gaps.

- **Eliminating Barriers**

There are countless barriers from K-12 districts through four-year institutions that impede student progress. Through collaboration, data sharing, and reform, eliminating these barriers can improve retention, completion, and academic success. Examples are access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses, eliminating costly Advanced Placement (AP) test fees, restructuring confusing community college course sequences, streamlining admissions requirements,

expanding the associates degree for transfer initiative, and reforming difficult-to-obtain academic advising upon transfer to four-year universities.

- **Improved Preparation / Reducing Remediation**

Through the use of alternative placement models and improved assessment and placement of students, education partnerships can apply analytic models to place students in college level courses and bypass unnecessary remediation.^{viii} High school transcripts along with the Smarter Balanced Assessment are strong indicators of college readiness in math and English and should be part of the dialogue in a College Promise.

- **Financial Assistance**

One of the many barriers to college access and persistence is cost. Although the cost of college represents only one hurdle for students, it is a significant hurdle, especially in terms of the high school to a community college transition. College Promise initiatives can allocate institutional, municipal, philanthropic, and other sources of financial support to help create a more seamless transition for students. One to two years of relief on tuition and other costs can go a long way for any student entering an institution of higher education^{ix}.

- **Community Wide Engagement for Broader Impact**

While education institutions like school districts, colleges, and universities are often some of the largest employers and most influential institutions in their communities, building financial and political support to overcome the significant barriers that can impede the success of College Promise efforts requires the support and investment of elected, business, and other civic leaders.

- **Engaging Elected Leaders**

Mayors, elected officials, and business leaders should be engaged in the College Promise efforts to support the development of clear pathways to success for all students. Mayors, in particular, have the power to convene business and other civic leaders and rally them to the cause of working with education institutions to ensure the relevance of curriculum, provide financial support, and to create internship and employment opportunities for students.

- **Results Beyond the Classroom**

Completion of high value degrees and certificates is critical to long term economic development. Many recent studies have identified a shortage of more than 1.1 million workers with the skills needed by employers in California alone.^x Only by better aligning academic programs, increasing success, and providing internships and work experience aligned with education programs can this gap be addressed.

Additional Considerations for Policy Makers

Leverage Existing Legislation

Previously enacted legislation such as Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)^{xi} and SB 1440^{xii} (Associates Degree for Transfer), are examples of efforts that can be leveraged in any College Promise initiative. These and other efforts were designed to improve access to and completion of college in a timelier manner, and improve equitable outcomes across ethnic, racial and socioeconomic groups. A College Promise initiative should not supplant these efforts but instead further reward the effective implementation of existing efforts.

Additional Higher Education Elements

- **Funding Methodology**

As LCFF has added a premium to funding school districts with student populations that are characteristic of being disadvantaged or showing higher need to improve outcomes, so too should College Promise policies consider adding a premium to state funding of community colleges and CSUs that serve high Pell eligible communities. If we as a state want to make good on the Promise of opportunity, we need to seek ways to incentivize colleges and universities to serve more students that are disadvantaged because of poverty or ethnicity. Leveraging existing legislation such as LCFF, policy makers can create incentives for colleges and universities to align their college completion goals to local school district Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP). Doing so further solidifies partnerships that are working to improve outcomes for all students in a community or region. Another element could include increased funding for colleges and universities in return for establishing structured college and career pathways with evaluative components that measure students' progress over time.

- **Incentivizing College Attendance**

Enabling colleges and universities to provide local preference incentives to encourage college attendance is important to creating a college-going culture.^{xiii} One of the best incentives that Long Beach State University has created for local students to commit to becoming college ready is guaranteeing access to the university if they meet minimum eligibility requirements. Signaling to all CSU campuses that such local preferences are good for improving local education attainment rates and rewarding those who establish admission policies that allows for such preferences is vital to realizing the benefits of a College Promise. Many disadvantaged students are discouraged from considering their local CSU because they feel that they are not competitive applicants. A College Promise initiative can change the paradigm in communities with low education attainment and encourage local school districts to improve the rigor of their college ready curriculum.

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