

Master Plan for Career Education Core Concepts

Overview

In August 2023, Governor Gavin Newsom [called](#) for a new Master Plan for Career Education, through [Executive Order N-11-23](#). This plan will increase equitable¹ access to living wage jobs by creating and strengthening education and training pathways that are specific to 1) sectors, 2) regions, and 3) individuals' skills and experience. These pathways will ensure that all Californians—whether youth just starting their first job search or experienced workers seeking a new career—can find opportunities that pay family-sustaining wages. By building these talent pipelines, our state can power economic growth and create more resilient communities in priority sectors such as education, healthcare, and climate.

Initial input from the agencies named in Master Plan for Career Education Executive Order² focused on four primary concepts: creating stronger coordination mechanisms, building skills-based pathways, expanding work-based learning, and increasing access to public benefits and career pathways. In the Master Plan that will be finalized in fall 2024, each of these concepts will include specific recommended actions and will be accompanied by proposed changes to statute, reallocation of funding streams, changes in agency responsibilities, and implementation suggestions for education, training, and social service providers.

The specific strategies for addressing the issues listed below will be informed by input from students, families, adult learners, workers, employers, labor, and community-based organizations, policymakers, as well as the educators, workforce training providers, and social services agencies that support economic mobility in California. By engaging and gathering input from California communities that have been historically disadvantaged and underserved, in accordance with state's approach to improving equity, we can identify solutions that address the needs of various types of learners and diverse learning contexts.

¹ See Executive Order [N-16-22](#).

² The named agencies include: Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development, California Department of Education, California Community Colleges, California Labor and Workforce Development Agency, California State University, Department of Rehabilitation, State Board of Education, and University of California.

Core Concepts

Create state and regional coordinating bodies that are informed by statewide data systems and supported through technical assistance networks

California underwrites learning opportunities through a broad range of mechanisms including K12 and postsecondary education, workforce training provided by workforce boards, adult schools, and apprenticeships, and programs focused on specific populations like English language learners, people with disabilities, and incarcerated populations. These education and training programs are resourced through numerous agencies, base funding streams, and specialized grant programs. While these programs may have similar goals, they often require separate plans, applications, and implementation components.

Many funding mechanisms that could ensure underrepresented populations access and complete education and career training (such as for foster youth, opportunity youth, or adults who have left the labor force) are either smaller-scale categorical funds or short-term in nature, which means that services are delivered as pilot programs that are difficult to sustain and scale. Requiring local providers to braid funding also disadvantages lower income and rural settings, which often have fewer resources for grant writing and planning.

Furthermore, information is not readily available on the outcomes of these interventions, either overall or disaggregated for specific populations, to evaluate whether state resources are achieving the state's goals for equitable economic mobility. Finally, agencies and practitioners may not be aware of shifts in regional labor markets that are changing which career opportunities pay living wages, which means their offerings may be out of sync with local jobs and future employer needs.

The Master Plan could address these issues and advance equity by:

- establishing a state career coordination body made up of workforce, education, and employer representatives that establishes joint plans and allocates state and federal funding related to statewide educational attainment and career education goals
- distributing funds through regional career councils that include workforce, education, and employer representatives, which also coordinate regional employer engagement while protecting local employer partnerships
- providing information on regional labor markets through a statewide entity that helps to pinpoint education and training needs that would allow specific populations to progress in specific sectors

- implementing incentive funding based on a set of common measures that are developed by the state career coordinating body and calculated based on data maintained in the Cradle-to-Career Data System
- coordinating technical assistance at the regional level across service delivery systems to support regional plans, while providing appropriate expertise for specific populations and education/training providers

Align regional and state K12, postsecondary, and workforce pathways using a skills framework

Securing a career that promotes economic mobility can be complex. Many students and workers need support in identifying promising pathways and finding the right education or training programs. For younger students, this information is often currently presented in a way that creates an artificial distinction between college and career. Rather than simultaneously preparing students for both options, those expressing interest in a specific career pathway may be directed toward prevalent but low-wage occupations, with few onramps to secure the ongoing education required for career growth. Furthermore, students are often confronted with stereotypes about who belongs in specific education and career pathways, which contributes to equity gaps such as the lower participation of women and underserved populations in STEM fields, few immigrants who enroll in adult education to learn English continuing on to earn a degree, and constrained options for people with disabilities.

Once in the workforce, adults rarely have access to career navigation and advancement services and have few options for documenting skills they have built in non-academic contexts. For example, it is up to individuals to describe the competencies they have gained in the workplace or the armed services to potential employers and figure out which jobs value those skills. While colleges are beginning to scale credit for prior learning and competency-based education, institutions are struggling to establish equivalencies and assess learning.

Furthermore, many rural Californians have limited opportunities for completing an affordable bachelor's degree in a high-demand field without having to move, putting additional strain on those supporting family members or with fewer economic resources.

Finally, the lack of trained educators in high-demand occupations, and in K12 education overall, means that people have insufficient opportunities to build critical skills.

The Master Plan could address these issues and advance equity by:

- establishing a set of skills-based model pathways in priority sectors to provide an organizing framework for coordinated planning and service delivery across education and training systems over an individual's lifetime, which will be co-developed by K12 educators,

postsecondary institutions, workforce training providers, and employers and include both technical and 21st Century skills

- sharing potential education and career pathways with young people, using a universal K12 curriculum that inspires students to explore a broad range of options and supports work-based learning starting in middle school
- providing adults with expanded opportunities to explore career options and support for career advancement through postsecondary institutions, the workforce system, and community based organizations
- establishing a statewide strategy to strengthen teacher preparation and credentialing pipelines
- coordinating enrollment management across K12, postsecondary, and workforce entities at the regional level to ensure adequate learning opportunities for careers, including stronger integration of adult education and the employer-driven training into community college service delivery systems and expanded online learning opportunities
- giving students and workers opportunities to rapidly progress in higher education by creating a shared mechanism for evaluating equivalencies between learning systems, so that community college and dual enrollment courses are universally counted toward specific degrees offered at CSU and UC and adults receive academic credit for learning in noncredit, workforce training, and job settings
- rebuilding eTranscript California to provide a mechanism for documenting community college coursework and learning that has been determined to be equivalent to community college courses, supported by universal transcript standards
- working with employers to design a tool that allows learners to curate their academic and work experience to apply for jobs with employers that use skills based hiring

Create incentives and improve coordination to provide work-based learning opportunities for K12 students and adult learners

Work-based learning opportunities, such as career exploration, job shadowing, work experience, internships, pre-apprenticeships, and apprenticeships, are generally brokered by individual institutions. Because employers are not engaged holistically by the various education and training providers in a region, institutions with fewer resources are less likely to provide high-quality opportunities. For example, there are fewer opportunities for work-based learning for justice-impacted people, immigrants, people with disabilities, and students in continuation schools. Furthermore, work-based learning is often a volunteer opportunity. This means that low-income youth and adults who are balancing education and training with their current employment may have less access to social networks, research opportunities, and contextualized learning.

The Master Plan could address these issues and advance equity by:

- creating universal definitions and standards for work-based learning

- creating strong incentives for employer participation, including addressing liability and coordination challenges
- ensuring that high school students can participate in work-based learning without compromising their ability to qualify for attending a four-year college, such as by offering academic credit for this experience
- establishing funding incentives for work-based learning and redesigning existing funding streams to support paid internships, pre-apprenticeships, and apprenticeships
- aligning service learning, research, and fellowship programs with specific career pathways and supporting paid opportunities
- leveraging the regional career councils to coordinate employer engagement

Accelerate the use of public benefit programs to make education and training affordable and improve universal access

Although California subsidizes education opportunities at a higher rate than most states, costs such as housing, food, childcare, medical care, transportation, and technology mean that most learners must juggle education and training with jobs and family responsibilities. Stark gaps in wealth mean that opportunity youth, low-income families, immigrants, and historically underserved populations must take on debt to cover the full cost of attendance, which has been a contributor to declining postsecondary enrollments.

Furthermore, adult learners and immigrants have fewer financial aid options and face complex systems to secure eligibility for public benefits. Given that adults of color are less likely to have a postsecondary credential (which often serves as a gateway to living wage jobs), the current system exacerbates a cycle of poverty.

Finally, existing systems impose considerable barriers for people with disabilities to participate in training and employment. If current systems were reimagined using universal access principles, this more human-centered approach would benefit people of all abilities.

The Master Plan could address these issues and advance equity by:

- strengthening mechanisms that encourage families to access benefits that support college savings
- increase access to financial supports so that underserved populations can participate in both short and longer-term training
- creating stronger systems for referring eligible learners to social benefit programs to help address the total cost of attending college and training
- ensuring people with disabilities fully participate in education and training programs by improving universal access to career pathways