



MASTER PLAN for Career Education

COMMUNITY INPUT AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE CALIFORNIA MASTER PLAN FOR CAREER EDUCATION

July 2024

Executive Summary

In August 2023 Governor Gavin Newsom launched the development of California's Master Plan for Career Education. This initiative aims to promote equitable access to high-paying jobs by addressing structural barriers and strengthening education and training pathways. The public submitted written comments that described priority concepts that should be addressed in the plan. This input was supplemented by more than 30 interviews with a variety of interest holders.

Four core concepts emerged from this input:

- **Access and Affordability:** Support education savings, financial aid, and public benefits programs, and ensure people with disabilities fully participate in education and training programs by improving universal access to career pathways that are designed to lead efficiently to in-demand careers.
- **Career Pathways:** Create college and career pathways beginning in middle school that are widely available and aligned with offerings in the higher education system. These should ensure that students can acquire the 21st century skills and applications of learning that will enable them to be prepared for initial careers and continue to learn in a changing economy. Enable navigation through education and training systems for living-wage jobs and career advancement.

- **Hands-On Learning, Work-Based Learning, Apprenticeship, and Employer Partnerships:** Scale systems supporting work-based learning that develop critical knowledge and skills, including pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs in high school and beyond, and strengthen regional processes to improve employer partnerships.
- **State and Regional Coordination:** Regularly evaluate the changing nature of work and the economy to define career pathways in which the state should invest and to which the sectors should respond. Enhance collaboration and decision-making between education systems, workforce providers, employers, community organizations, and interest holders.

During spring 2024, eight design sessions were held in locations from the far north of California to the southern border, and two virtual convenings. More than 840 community members attended these events to generate strategies for the Master Plan for Career Education, including educators from TK–12, community colleges, and 4-year institutions, adult education and workforce training providers, community-based organizations, labor representatives, and employers.

While there was some variation in responses by region, similar themes emerged across the state. Participants indicated common challenges for learners, including financial barriers, limited guidance on careers, a disconnect between industry and education, lack of alignment between education and training providers, and fragmentation of funding and data systems.

However, the way these challenges manifested varied by education and training systems. For example, TK–12 educators noted disparities in access to career information based on geographic location, socioeconomic status, and local resources. Community college students struggle with institutions that are not set up to fit the schedules of working adults. Employers flagged that learning opportunities are splintered across systems that are complex and poorly coordinated, making it difficult for learners to gain the skills they need. Four-year institution representatives described the digital divide, which constrains access to education, particularly in rural regions. Adult education providers emphasized challenges in the credentialing process for teachers, while community members stated that teachers didn't have adequate training to address the needs of populations such as students with disabilities.

When asked how the Master Plan for Career Education could make it easier for people to attain their career and life goals, participants called for a plan that is integrated,

flexible, and inclusive and that ensures early exposure to career paths, streamlined administration, opportunities to build real-world skills, and practical pathways to success. The regional convenings also yielded many specific recommendations in the four areas of action.

To increase access and affordability, learners should receive comprehensive support services that are integrated with more robust financial aid. To ensure parents, students, and adult learners know about these opportunities, financial planning and literacy courses should describe options for college savings, financial aid, and public benefits.

Career pathways should be strengthened by integrating career education into coursework starting from early grades, including technical competencies, 21st Century skills, and fundamentals such as financial literacy, resume writing, and interviewing techniques. Employers should be engaged to develop relevant coursework and to offer career exposure opportunities so that all levels of education reflect the skills needed in the workforce. Postsecondary institutions should recognize credit for prior learning using a standardized and simplified process. In addition, transfer pathways should be aligned, with more opportunities to transition from shorter term career and technical education certificates to degrees. Finally, funding should be more sustained and consistent.

Participants suggested that hands-on and work-based learning would be improved with state-level standards, tracking systems to understand who is participating in these activities, and incentives to employers using a statewide framework for employer engagement. Learners at all stages of life should be alerted about work-based learning opportunities through an online resource hub and communications plan. In addition, high school students would be more likely to participate in work-based learning if schools offered academic credit and if work-based learning became a graduation requirement.

Finally, participants envisioned stronger state and regional coordination structures, including establishing dedicated entities to manage collaboration; providing resources for collaboration; creating sector-based regional plans that clarify roles for TK–12, community colleges, adult education, 4-year institutions, and workforce development organizations; and creating common measures to keep the focus on learner success.

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Introduction

This report provides an overview of the Master Plan for Career Education Regional Design Sessions, which brought together community members and interest holders to solicit their perspectives and input about California's Master Plan for Career Education. The report highlights the collective insights and feedback gathered from these convenings, underscoring the importance of community engagement in shaping effective career education strategies.

Background

On August 31, 2023, California Governor Newsom announced a new Master Plan for Career Education through the [Freedom to Succeed](#) press release and Executive Order [N-11-23](#). This plan aims to promote equitable access to high-paying jobs by creating and strengthening education and training pathways for specific sectors and regions. These pathways are intended to ensure that all Californians—whether youths just starting their first job search or experienced workers seeking a new career—can find opportunities that pay family-sustaining wages. By addressing structural barriers to participation in education and training, California can power economic growth in priority sectors such as education, health care, and climate and create more resilient communities.

The Executive Order also delineates strategic priorities for aligning and coordinating existing state investments in TK–12 education, postsecondary education, workforce development, labor, and employer engagement. The Executive Order highlights the urgent need to integrate and align implementation of the state's investments and policies across various programs and initiatives, so they foster economic mobility and address equity disparities. It emphasizes that consideration must be given to how proposed actions in the plan impact three overarching goals: Career Pathways, Hands-on Learning and Real-Life Skills, and Universal Access and Affordability.

Development of the Plan

It is important to note that the development of the Master Plan for Career Education is centered on supporting career education in a broad sense. There are many venues in which people learn the skills they need to be successful in their careers and lives, including completing technical certificates in high school, community college, or adult

school; gaining skills in programs aimed at workers who have lost their jobs or need retraining; engaging in apprenticeships; obtaining competences through military service or work experience; and following academic pathways that extend from associate degrees to doctorates. The Master Plan for Career Education seeks to help Californians more easily navigate between these systems so that they can enter and advance in their desired fields.

The state's comprehensive approach to developing the plan involves engaging all sectors of education—including TK–12, adult education, California Community Colleges (CCCs), California State Universities (CSUs), the University of California (UC), and the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU)—along with student, labor, workforce, and employer representatives. Such cross-sector collaboration ensures a cohesive and effective strategy in preparing individuals for the demands of the modern job market, with the goal of contributing to the economic growth of the state by creating a well-equipped and versatile workforce.

Core Concepts Developed with Interest Holder Input

The Governor's Office partnered with WestEd, a nonpartisan research, development, and service agency, to engage community members on the development of the plan. The initial phase of developing the Master Plan for Career Education involved gathering written comments from the agencies named in the Executive Order.¹ In addition, WestEd conducted more than 30 interviews with interest holders and reviewed written comments submitted by the public. Feedback from these activities led to the identification of the following four core concepts related to career education:

- **Access and Affordability:** Support education savings, improve co-enrollment in financial aid and public benefits programs, and ensure people with disabilities fully participate in education and training programs by improving universal access to career pathways that are designed to lead efficiently to in-demand careers.
- **Career Pathways:** Create college and career pathways beginning in middle school that are widely available and aligned with offerings in the higher education system. These should ensure that students can acquire the 21st

¹ The named agencies are the State Board of Education, California Labor and Workforce Development Agency, Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development, California Department of Rehabilitation, CCCs, CSU, UC, and California Department of Education.

century skills and applications of learning that will enable them to be prepared for initial careers and continue to learn in a changing economy. Enable navigation through education and training systems for living-wage jobs and career advancement.

- **Hands-On Learning, Work-Based Learning, Apprenticeship, and Employer Partnerships:** Scale systems supporting work-based learning that develop critical knowledge and skills, including pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs in high school and beyond, and strengthen regional processes to improve employer partnerships.
- **State and Regional Coordination:** Regularly evaluate the changing nature of work and the economy to define career pathways in which the state should invest and to which the sectors should respond. Enhance collaboration and decision-making between education systems, workforce providers, employers, community organizations, and stakeholders.

These core concepts established a clear direction for developing the Master Plan for Career Education, including guiding the activities and dialogue in the regional design sessions. By focusing on these core concepts, the plan aims to create a more integrated, inclusive, and effective system for career education. As the plan progresses, ongoing collaboration and interest holder engagement will be essential to identifying, refining, and implementing strategies. Ultimately, the plan is intended to ensure that all Californians, regardless of their background or circumstances, have the opportunity to gain valuable skills, secure meaningful employment, and contribute to the state's economic growth.

Regional Design Sessions

The Governor's Office and WestEd worked with K–16 Regional Collaboratives and the Jobs First Consortia to alert community members about the opportunity to participate in regional design sessions, which were structured convenings to gather input about pain points and potential solutions related to the Master Plan for Career Education. Information about participating in these sessions was also posted on the website dedicated to the Master Plan for Career Education (careereducation.gov.ca.gov/master-plan-engage).

More than 1,680 people expressed interest. Given space constraints that prevented larger events, attendees were selected to ensure a broad range of perspectives,

including TK–12; community colleges; CSU; UC; independent colleges and universities; adult education; community-based organizations, other organizations; and labor, workforce, and employer representatives. All together, 842 people attended the regional design sessions (see Table 1).

Working with local partners, the Governor's Office and WestEd convened eight in-person regional design sessions across the state in March and April 2024. All sessions adhered to a uniform format—including the agenda, activities, breakout rooms, and discussion topics—to ensure consistency throughout the process. In addition, the Governor's Office and WestEd hosted two virtual sessions in May 2024 to accommodate those who could not attend the in-person events, offering condensed but equally structured opportunities for input. The virtual sessions were attended by people from across the state.

The qualitative data resulting from these sessions were synthesized, and potential actions were drafted to inform the development of the Master Plan for Career Education. This approach supported the cross-verification of the data collected.

Table 1. Regional Design Sessions Details

Date	Region and venue	Number of participants
March 1, 2024	Southern Border Imperial Valley College	94
March 8, 2024	Los Angeles/Orange County CSU, Long Beach	95
March 22, 2024	Sacramento—Capitol Region CSU, Sacramento	70
March 29, 2024	Inland Empire San Bernardino Valley College	156
April 11, 2024	Central Valley Fresno City College	106
April 12, 2024	San Francisco Bay Area UC, Santa Cruz Silicon Valley Extension	96
April 17, 2024	Far North Shasta College	31
April 17, 2024	Far North—Redwood Coast—Arcata—Eureka Eureka High School	35

Date	Region and venue	Number of participants
May 15, 2024	Virtual online sessions	159

The implementation of the regional design sessions was made possible through the generous support of the College Futures Foundation, Gates Foundation, Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, Strada Education Foundation, and Stuart Foundation. Their involvement has been fundamental in advancing the development of the Master Plan for Career Education.

In addition, the regional design session local sponsors provided invaluable support and contributions that made the convenings possible. Local sponsorship for each regional session was crucial in ensuring the success and impact of the events. For more details on local sponsorship, please refer to Appendix A, Regional Design Session Sponsors.

Structure and Objectives of the Regional Design Sessions

The objectives of the regional design sessions were for participants to

- have a positive experience and understand how their input will shape the Master Plan for Career Education;
- identify the biggest regional barriers that prevent Californians from learning and gaining credit for the skills they need to achieve rewarding, living-wage work;
- provide input on the proposed solutions being considered for the Master Plan for Career Education; and
- offer additional ideas and suggestions for addressing systemic barriers.

The following sections describe the activities involved in each part of the sessions and provide summaries of the session findings.

Welcome and Overview

As participants entered the regional design sessions, they were seated according to their affiliation with one of the following six constituent groups:

- TK–12
- community colleges

- CSU, UC, independent colleges and universities
- adult education
- community-based organizations, other organizations
- labor, workforce, and employers

Students were placed with the segment of education that they currently attend (e.g., TK–12 or college). This arrangement facilitated targeted discussions and collaboration among peers with similar roles and interests.

Interactive Icebreaker

To set a foundation for the day, participants were asked to respond in writing to three central questions:

1. Who brings you to this work today?
2. What is one way that the Master Plan for Career Education can make it easier for you to help people attain their career and life goals?
3. What would most make you feel like it was worth your time to be here today?

After writing their responses to these questions, participants engaged in an interactive exchange. First, they crumpled up their papers and tossed them to another area of the meeting space. Each participant then picked up a response, read it, and shared insights within small groups. This dynamic method fostered active participation, highlighted diverse perspectives and experiences, and helped identify commonalities. This activity also helped participants explore personal motivations and expectations and modeled the experience of seeking to understand others' perspectives—one of the recommended mindsets of the day.

Motivation

Participants were motivated to attend the regional design sessions by both personal and professional reasons. Their responses to the question “Who brings you to this work today?” highlighted the following:

- **Personal connections:** Participants were driven by close relationships, including family members with disabilities, siblings, children, and mentors who inspired them to engage in education and workforce development.
- **Professional roles:** Participants' current positions, such as administrators, teachers, and organization representatives, were often cited as reasons for their involvement.

- **Desire to affect change:** Common threads that ran through the responses included the aspiration to improve the education-to-employment pathways, help students navigate their futures, and create opportunities for underserved populations.
- **Experiences with students:** Having direct interactions with students, ranging from those in high school to adult learners, was a significant motivator to attend the sessions, highlighting a desire to support students who do not have clear paths or who face barriers to success.
- **Personal journeys:** Participants were influenced by their own educational and career explorations, which many reported being challenging or lengthy, prompting them to help others find more efficient paths.
- **Community engagement:** Many attendees represented larger groups, such as opportunity youth, multilingual learners, people with disabilities, and communities of color, indicating a strong drive for community betterment and equity.

Support

In response to the second question, participants shared ways that the Master Plan for Career Education could make it easier to help people attain their career and life goals. Their responses called for a plan that is integrated, flexible, and inclusive and that ensures early exposure to career paths, streamlined administration, opportunities to build real-world skills, and practical pathways to success. Below are suggestions provided by the participants:

- “Address internal education/system silos that make it almost impossible for employers to know where to go [and] how to participate when they want to engage and support students.”
- “Introduce career path[s] sooner and allow students to see the diverse career fields available.”
- “Make the message clear that [career and technical education] is not second best to a 4-year education.”
- “Less redundancy and more cohesion in similar programs, grants, and their management to assist in career management and planning for students.”
- “The plan needs to be realistic and non-political. People are hurting, suffering, seeking self-sufficiency beyond a living wage and we are not providing an easy, real sustainable pathway to success.”

Participation Value

Participants also shared what would give them the greatest sense of value and fulfillment from participating in the sessions. Their responses are summarized below:

- **Actionable and implementable outcomes.** Participants envisioned a concrete Master Plan for Career Education that leads to tangible changes in California's workforce and education systems.
- **Collaboration and networking.** Responses emphasized the importance of making connections with like-minded individuals and organizations, suggesting that they probably value the opportunity to collaborate, share ideas, and create partnerships that lead to meaningful work and benefit students.
- **Inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives.** Participants expressed a desire for all voices to be heard, especially those from underrepresented or marginalized groups. They wanted to ensure that feedback from various interest holders is included in the final plan.
- **Regional inclusivity and representation.** Responses highlighted the importance of accounting for the needs of remote, rural, and tribal communities, ensuring that initiatives are not centralized in urban areas only.
- **Realistic next steps and follow-up.** Attendees wanted to leave the sessions with a clear understanding of next steps and expressed their expectations that they receive consistent follow-up information on the plan's status through implementation.
- **Integration of feedback into policy and practice.** There was a strong desire to see the session's input actively integrated into state-level changes and policy shifts, reflecting the collective voice of the participants.

Guiding Principles

Participants were provided with guiding principles for the day, designed to ensure a focused and collaborative effort. These principles included seizing the day by embracing challenges with enthusiasm; co-creating by collaboratively identifying necessary systems, policies, structures, and processes; understanding each other's perspectives through active listening; and focusing on fixing processes rather than people by using intentional, asset-based language to support learners, families, communities, and each other.

Defining the Problem

For the second activity, participants worked in small groups with colleagues from their constituent groups to identify the most significant barriers, pain points, and challenges that prevent Californians from accessing education; receiving credit for their skills; and obtaining rewarding, high-paying work. This collaborative effort aimed to surface critical issues impacting different regions and sectors, fostering a deeper understanding of the systemic obstacles faced by various communities. The insights gathered from this activity informed subsequent discussions. Across all regional sessions, participants articulated over 3,140 pain points.

Shared Pain Points

Participants identified the following fundamental challenges to career education access and success:

- **Financial barriers for learners.** Financial challenges were a recurrent theme, including the high cost of school and textbooks; related expenses for housing, transportation, childcare, and technology; and the difficulty of “financing education without debt.”
- **Access to support services for learners.** Across all education levels, participants frequently cited students' lack of access to necessary support services for “childcare,” “mental health services for students,” and food security.
- **Limited guidance on career planning.** Participants highlighted that “students are not aware of nontraditional career pathways” and the need for more career exploration opportunities starting at earlier education levels.
- **Disconnection between industry and education.** There is a lack of cohesion between industry and education in creating career pathways, validating skills, and providing work-based learning opportunities. “Employers need to be a partner, not just end users” in career education.
- **Lack of alignment.** Lack of coordinated goals, accountability, and initiatives at the state level and across educational systems make it “hard to create synergy.” Participants highlighted a “chasm between high school and postsecondary education” and “disconnects in systems and departments” that affected dual enrollment credit, transfer processes, noncredit to credit alignment, and career pathways.
- **Lack of sustained and coordinated funding for programs.** Participants said that siloed funding streams, “nonsustainable funding sources,” and

“competitive/unpredictable funding” for career education posed challenges to long-term planning, collaboration, and sustained programming.

- **Fragmentation of data systems.** Disparate data systems with “different metrics” hinder data sharing and tracking. Interest holders expressed difficulty tracking data across “siloes systems” and observed a “lack of longitudinal statewide data.”

Pain Points Specific to Particular Interest Holder Groups

In addition to the common pain points shared above, participants also identified pain points that were specific to their respective interest holder groups:

- **TK–12.** Participants identified uneven access to career and technical education programs “based on zip code” and disparities in program availability based on geographic location, socioeconomic status, and available local resources.
- **Adult education.** Participants shared that educators face difficulties with the credentialing process, which can lead to a shortage of qualified teachers: “Adult Ed teachers are few and credentialing is challenging.”
- **Community colleges.** Pain points include a lack of “flexibility in scheduling” that is responsive to students’ life circumstances and accommodates nontraditional learners and working adults: “Training programs offered at inconvenient times (M–F, 8am–5pm).”
- **UC, CSU, and independent colleges and universities.** The “digital divide (access to technology)” was a commonly mentioned barrier, particularly in rural areas. Connectivity infrastructure is essential for students to engage in school and explore careers.
- **Community-based organizations, state agencies, and other organizations.** Representatives named support and resources for educators as distinct pain points. “Educators need more training” to better support students with disabilities and “[English language] learners at all levels.”
- **Labor, workforce, and employers.** Participants identified barriers caused by bureaucracy and “system complexity,” in which complex eligibility processes make it difficult for learners to navigate education and training opportunities.

Co-Crafting Solutions (Breakout Sessions)

Once participants identified shared pain points, the focus transitioned to exploring solutions in four topical breakout sessions. The sessions were repeated, giving participants an opportunity to attend two different breakouts. The four topics were

- Access and Affordability;
- Career Pathways;
- Hands-On Learning, Work-Based Learning, Apprenticeship, and Employer Partnerships; and
- State and Regional Coordination.

During these breakout sessions, participants were guided through a series of structured questions, and they collaborated in small groups to create solutions boards focused on their respective topics. The purpose of these solutions boards was to unite colleagues in assessing key issues and brainstorming innovative solutions to better serve students and communities. Each board collected participants' input related to strengths, impacts, opportunities, challenges, and recommendations.

This collaborative activity fostered a deeper understanding of the core concepts and generated actionable insights to enhance career education. The sessions encouraged diverse perspectives, allowing for a more comprehensive exploration of ideas. By sharing experiences and knowledge, participants were able to identify promising practices and draft strategic approaches tailored to the unique needs of their respective regions and sectors.

Solution Board Highlights

This section provides summaries and direct participant quotes related to impact, opportunities and strengths, and recommendations for each of the four core topics.

Access and Affordability

Participants shared solutions for topics related to access and affordability, including bundling financial aid and public benefits, supporting educational savings for financial aid, providing financial support for adult learners, and implementing universal design and access.

Impact

Participants envisioned that increased access and affordability would lead to the following:

- **Improved success in higher education** by allowing students to focus on their studies rather than on making ends meet. Improved affordability would “allow adult learners to meet basic needs and not have to choose between survival and education.”
- **Greater financial security for students** and “less debt,” with decreased reliance on student loans.
- **Greater equity and access in education and careers**, ensuring all students, regardless of their financial background, can access rewarding education and careers.
- **Reduced financial stress** and “anxiety for students and their families” by alleviating the financial pressures associated with education and training programs.
- **Increased financial and social mobility and stability** and related impacts on society, such as better health, less reliance on state assistance, and a “stronger economy.”

Opportunities and Strengths

Participants identified opportunities to address affordability challenges, which would help more families, young adults, and adult learners access education and training. In many cases, they listed existing practices that exemplify approaches that could be scaled across the state. For example, they suggested the following:

- **Emphasizing centralized support programs.** Participants described student support systems staffed by individuals trained to help students navigate social assistance options. This includes “basic needs centers staffed by former students,” “wraparound support services for adult learners and others in their household,” and “public outreach staff [to] assist prospective students with [federal workforce funding] paperwork.”
- **Expanding state financial aid for adults.** Expanding financial aid access with greater access to public benefits and financial aid for adult learners by “streamlining and expanding access to Cal Grant.”

- **Increasing education about support options at the TK–12 level.** Participants highlighted options such as FAFSA, California Dream Act Application, 529 plans, scholarships, and other financial opportunities.
- **Integrating college, career, and financial guidance.** Curricula like “Get Focused. Stay Focused embeds financial planning into career guidance and should be scaled statewide.:
- **Creating and aligning information about local and state child savings accounts.** “CaliforniaColleges.edu could embed ScholarShare, CalKIDS, CalABLE.”

Participant Recommendations

Participants recommended the following policies, systems, and programs to help more families and individuals plan financially and build savings for their education:

- **Provide comprehensive support services.** Participants focused on basic needs, counseling, career services, and academic support at community colleges and training centers for apprenticeship sites.
- **Improve outreach and information** related to college savings programs, financial aid, and public benefits, especially for underserved populations like “adult learners, justice-involved [and] foster youth.”
- **Create programming to educate families** on financial planning for college and training programs.
- **Mandate financial planning and literacy courses.** These should be offered at various educational levels, from TK–12 to adult learners, ensuring early intervention.
- **Align systems so financial aid is integrated with other forms of public assistance.** As one interest holder articulated, “Create systems that talk ... so we don’t work in silos and [so we] can provide comprehensive support to students.”
- **Increase access to financial aid.** Suggested strategies included reforming taxes and expanding eligibility for grants instead of loans, including “reset on FAFSA eligibility if returning after a certain time,” “increase [maximum] Pell,” and “expand eligibility for CalGrants to include [Regional Occupational Program]/[career and technical education] funding for adult learners.”

Regional Variation

In their input, participants also highlighted the distinct priorities of their respective regions:

- **Redwood Coast.** In this region, there were multiple recommendations related to support for universal basic income models, and attendees proposed that California “expand universal basic income statewide.”
- **Bay Area.** Participants emphasized the importance of early financial education and savings programs for children such as “financial planning (529s, college savings, etc.) at the early elementary level (K–2nd).”
- **Central Valley.** Feedback focused on educational access and affordability for working families and expanding financial aid for “working adults who want to upskill and change careers.”
- **San Bernardino.** Transportation emerged as a unique priority for education access. Attendees mentioned “redesigning city infrastructure to improve public transportation.”

Career Pathways

Suggested solutions related to career pathways centered on college and career readiness, credit for prior learning, credit transferability between institutions, and alignment of jobs with community and labor market needs.

Impact

Participants discussed the impact that clear, equitable, and streamlined career pathways that include credit for prior learning would provide for learners and families:

- **Greater efficiency in the education system.** Clarifying options, streamlining progression, and establishing on-ramps and off-ramps would enable learners to reach their goals more efficiently. In particular, validating and crediting prior learning and experiences would reduce redundancy through “not duplicating coursework” that students have already mastered.
- **Expanded career knowledge.** All learners, especially those from traditionally underserved groups, should have equal access to quality education and training, leading to a more inclusive workforce.
- **Higher completion rates for students and reduced time to degree completion.** This will lead to quicker entry into the workforce, allowing students to “earn more sooner.”
- **Faster completion of career pathways.** Improved career pathways will help “level the playing field,” particularly for underrepresented and nontraditional students, because it will allow individuals to access education and employment without unnecessary setbacks.

- **Improved employment outcomes.** If “courses/degrees in public education are connected to regional/local demand,” they can support employer needs and be responsive to growth industries.

Opportunities and Strengths

Drawing on their shared knowledge of the field, participants suggested promising practices and existing successes in career pathways that could be scaled throughout the state:

- **Developing robust partnerships between employers and universities to offer work-based learning experiences.** “An example of a successful program is San Manuel Gateway College” where students can earn a health care certificate while also developing skills for future employment through a partnership with Loma Linda University. Other promising employer-based training collaborations in the state include “Touro [Health Careers Opportunity Program] program, Climate Summer Youth Program in Solano, Napa First 5, Biomanufacturing Bachelor of Arts program at [Solano Community College], Working Waterfront Coalition, [and] Solano County Office of Education auto tech program.”
- **Creating aligned education pathways with stackable credentials to enable smooth transitions between education institutions and careers.** As articulated by one participant, “Common course numbering systems and stackable credentials are needed for students to easily bridge from one career to another (e.g., engineer to teacher).” Another participant highlighted the following programs: “Madera Unified [Certified Nursing Assistant] program to [Licensed Vocational Nurse] program in partnership with Madera Community College. Then the [Licensed Vocational Nurse] to [Registered Nurse] program continues at Fresno State.”
- **Investing in dual-enrollment initiatives.** More high school students could be incentivized to take college courses early, such as a program at Oakland Unified that “pays students for completing dual enrollment.”

Participant Recommendations

To improve career pathways for students and families, participants shared the following recommendations for the state:

- **Provide early and integrated career education.** Start career education at younger ages and in earlier grades to help students connect their learning to

employable skills, setting a strong foundation for their future career paths by ensuring they are “aware of career opportunities from the start.”

- **Use employer input and feedback.** This information can inform programs, courses, and “learning objectives and outcomes.” TK–12, community college, adult education, and college and university partners can also work closely “in collaboration with business, industries, etc. throughout the school year” to expose students to jobs in the local economy.
- **Integrate professional skills into the learning process.** This will allow students to develop skills that can be applied across their careers. Participants called for integrating skills such as self-management, resume building, interview preparation, and life skills into education.
- **Increase and sustain funding for career education programs.** Participants reported a need for long-term, “sustained, consistent funding” for college and career readiness programs, as opposed to relying on one-time grants or competitive funding.
- **Align educational offerings with the skill requirements of regional industry needs.** By prioritizing education that meets the demands of high-priority jobs and regional needs, students would have higher success rates post-completion, and the community would benefit from a trained workforce ready to meet current and future challenges.
- **Create a state system to offer credit for prior learning.** “Standardize and simplify” the processes for transferring credits and recognizing prior learning through work and life experience, military service, and foreign credentials.
- **Align and simplify transfer pathways.** Increase consistency and cohesion across systems and institutions and improve integration between career and technical education programs and transfers to 4-year institutions. Participants offered recommendations such as ensuring work-based learning and “appropriate apprenticeship classes” are transferable and “communicat[ing] how [career and technical education] and 4-year transfer are not mutually exclusive.”

Regional Variation

While there was a consensus on many suggestions regarding career pathways, participants’ contributions also brought to light the specific priorities unique to their individual regions:

- **Shasta.** Shasta participants called for more support and resources for rural schools, emphasizing the challenges unique to rural educational settings and identifying a need to “recognize rural challenges and opportunities.”
- **Sacramento.** Participants from Sacramento focused on using career pathways to fill skills gaps with “qualified and trained workers” in the region.
- **San Bernardino.** Feedback focused on “bringing small business to the forefront” and relying on partnerships with business to develop career pathways (this was also a theme for Shasta).
- **Virtual.** In virtual sessions, participants recommended culturally responsive professional development for educators and counselors providing career guidance.

Hands-on Learning, Work-Based Learning, Apprenticeship, and Employer Partnerships

Participants shared input about work-based learning including apprenticeships, employer partnerships, and hands-on activities that help students understand the relevance of classroom learning for their career and life.

Impact

Participants imagined that work-based learning would provide students, families, and communities with the following:

- **Greater self-confidence, communication, and understanding of career requirements.** Enhanced career exploration “allows students to discover interests [and] potential pathways,” explore different industries and career options, and “articulate career readiness skills.”
- **A strengthened economy.** By creating a pipeline of workers with “more robust skills” who are trained and familiar with industry standards, California would strengthen local economies.
- **Expanded professional networks and increased social capital for students and the community as a whole.** Work-based learning fosters connections between schools, students, and employers, building social capital and educating families about new opportunities.
- **Increased engagement from students.** Learners would have more opportunities for real-world and hands-on learning experiences.
- **More equitable opportunities for all students.** Engaging in hands-on learning and developing career interests would support subgroups of learners, such as individuals with disabilities and former foster youth, to access high-paying jobs.

Opportunities and Strengths

Participants identified existing programs and practices in work-based learning and employer partnerships that the state could build on, including the following:

- **Building strong partnerships between educational institutions, industry associations, community-based organizations, and workforce development boards.** Examples included partnering with America's Job Center of California to provide partnerships for paid internships.
- **Facilitating career awareness and preparation from an early age and embedding work-based learning into the curriculum at all educational levels.** Programs like Regional Occupational Programs, dual enrollment, and project-based learning with employer involvement were highlighted as effective ways to bridge classroom learning with career readiness.
- **Tracking work-based learning hours to monitor student progress and outcomes.** "Follow [the example of] Fresno Unified [and use a software solution] for data tracking of work-based learning hours."
- **Creating work-based learning models that support students with disabilities, English Learners, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.** "Madera County Workforce [Assistance Center] is an exemplary practice working with in-school youth (especially with youth from marginalized areas)."
- **Expanding apprenticeship programs.** Industry-driven apprenticeships such as "[Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education] programs" "show that when employers have real skin in the game, training aligns with their needs."
- **Utilizing support structures for employer engagement.** For example, Career Nexus, an intermediary in Fresno, makes appropriate placements for both employees and employers.

Participant Recommendations

Participants suggested the following supports, policies, and programs to help educators and employers scale and institutionalize work-based learning:

- **Develop state standards for evaluating work-based learning opportunities across industries.** "Create a data tracking system" for the state to measure and track the effectiveness of work-based learning.
- **Offer employers incentives.** Potential options included "wage incentive[s], tax breaks," or direct funding to encourage employers to create work-based

learning opportunities, “support new employees and upskill existing employees,” and “hire interns.”

- **Integrate work-based learning into graduation requirements and provide academic credit for work-based learning.** These opportunities should be provided for students whether or not they are in a career and technical education pathway.
- **Create a statewide framework to support employer engagement.** The framework should include a clear set of expectations, resources, and incentives to encourage and support employer participation in work-based learning and apprenticeship programs.
- **Establish a communication plan and resource hub.** Websites and social media should be used to disseminate information about hands-on learning opportunities.

Regional Variation

In their input, participants also highlighted the distinct priorities of their respective regions:

- **Bay Area.** Feedback from the Bay Area emphasized apprenticeships in technology companies as a way of connecting learners to “high-wage and high-growth careers.”
- **Los Angeles/Orange County.** Los Angeles/Orange County participants highlighted apprenticeships as a route to civil service jobs and recommended apprenticeships as an alternative to civil service exams.
- **Southern Border.** At the Southern Border session, participants emphasized developing a regional intermediary to support hands-on learning and creating “a one-stop regional hub around apprenticeships.”
- **Virtual.** Virtual session participants mentioned “work-based learning opportunities for students with disabilities” and the importance of inclusivity in the planning, design, and marketing of work-based learning.

State and Regional Coordination

The breakout group focused on state and regional coordination focused on developing solutions to support stronger cooperation and shared decision-making among education (TK–12, adult education, community colleges, 4-year colleges, and universities), workforce providers, employers, community organizations, and other interest holders.

Impact

Participants articulated the following anticipated impacts of reformed state and regional coordination:

- **More efficient use of resources.** Working across educational institutions, workforce providers, and community organizations could yield greater “coordination and consistency.”
- **Increased degree and career success and attainment.** Students are more likely to succeed when educational systems streamline processes and pathways.
- **Greater equity and democratization.** Coordination could be designed to ensure that community voices, especially those from marginalized groups, are included.
- **Greater funding alignment.** Joint planning would allow state funding to be synchronized with “what programs need at the regional/local levels.”

Opportunities and Strengths

Leveraging their collective expertise, the participants identified existing systems in their regions to support state and regional coordination:

- **Using existing data structures to inform decision-making.** Specific examples included the Cradle-to-Career Data System and the Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research to “leverage labor market data to inform regional decisions and plans.”
- **Expanding apprenticeship programs.** California can “build on proven models, like the success of apprenticeships in Europe,” and partner with “companies like Accenture” to create tech apprenticeships.
- **Scaling successful models of cross-segment collaboration.** Examples include Hayward Promise Neighborhood, Growing Inland Achievement, East Bay Works, and K–16 Collaborative coordinators.

Participant Recommendations

To improve state and regional collaboration, participants made the following recommendations for the Master Plan for Career Education:

- **Develop sector-based regional plans.** The plans should define clear roles and responsibilities across education levels (TK–12, community colleges, adult education, 4-year institutions) and workforce development organizations and be aligned with regional economic priorities.

- **Allocate resources for regional collaboration.** Convert grant funding to provide permanent funding for entities such as community colleges, Regional Occupational Programs, and regional advisory boards.
- **Create common measures.** Document outcomes through the Cradle-to-Career Data System to “hold all systems accountable” and keep the state’s focus on student success.
- **Create an intermediary.** This entity should “manage regional/state collaboration,” facilitate stronger employer engagement and partnerships, and ensure education and workforce programs are responsive to employer needs.

Regional Variation

In addition to the shared recommendations, several regions indicated distinct priorities in state and regional coordination:

- **Shasta and Redwood Coast.** Several participants focused on the creation of regional committees to focus on acute issues facing rural communities, such as broadband access and teacher retention. Participants called attention to investment in rural areas and recommended that the state “develop a rubric/policy to address rural/disinvested community capacity.”
- **Los Angeles/Orange County.** While mentioned in several regions, common metrics and outcomes were a specific focus of input from the Los Angeles/Orange County region. Participants suggested a “common vocabulary” around career education and work-based learning.
- **Southern Border.** Input from the Southern Border emphasized the creation of advisory boards of industry and community leaders as a structure for regional coordination.

Note on regional variation: *While there was some regional variation in the input that participants provided (as illustrated in the Regional Variation bullet points throughout this section), there was generally significant consistency in participants’ input across regions. While context and specifics at times varied, the themes and insights provided reflect shared pain points, opportunities, and solutions that exist across the state. The statewide Master Plan for Career Education can leverage and address these shared experiences to advance career education opportunities for Californians from the Far North to the Southern Border.*

End-of-Day Participant Recommendations

At the end of the day, participants were asked to complete the following prompt: “To ensure that Californians have access to opportunity, the Master Plan for Career Education must ...” Participants’ qualitative responses were gathered through PollEverywhere, an online audience engagement system that was accessible to participants through a QR code or URL. Participants were instructed to add their own responses and to “upvote” other responses.

There were a total of 663 responses across all regions. The total net votes, including all upvotes, was 1,433. The data were coded using emergent (also known as inductive) coding to allow themes to surface from the data rather than be based on preestablished concepts. Participants’ end-of-day recommendations included both foundational principles and specific recommendations to include in the Master Plan for Career Education. Themes within both categories are listed below, along with examples of recommendations provided by participants.

Foundational Principles to Include in the Master Plan for Career Education

Use a Collaborative and Realistic Approach to Developing the Master Plan for Career Education

Include all community members (youths, children, families, partners, employers, workforce, faculty, nonprofits) and meet them where they are. Be culturally responsive, comprehensive, child-centered, action-oriented, flexible, and realistic. Communicate with interested parties around the process and outcome of the Master Plan for Career Education.

- “Involve youth in the decision-making process.”
- “Leverage existing structures and expertise and be inclusive of ALL community members and collaborative partners.”
- “Be cost effective.”
- “Be realistically implementable.”
- “Take cultural sensitivity into account in the way it is developed and marketed.”
- “Outline and clearly state all the solutions as well as the challenges that people face, for them to find their opportunity.”

Ensure Accountability

Embed and streamline review processes and accountability measures through legislative mandates and incentives, with private sector input if possible.

- “Be able to be periodically reviewed and revised.”
- “Commit to short- and long-term goals and be accountable to the citizens (students, taxpayers, etc.)”

Improve Coordination

Align data and systems to strengthen collaboration among employers (especially small- and medium-sized businesses) and education, workforce, and social services sectors, including incentivizing workforce participation.

- “Include more robust conversation with public and private industry employers, especially those leading small and medium businesses.”
- “Align all systems to work together so it is easier to collaborate as practitioners and assist students as they navigate transitions.”
- “Break down the silos between K–12, higher ed (and within higher ed), workforce, and human services to design a system based on how real humans live and their holistic needs.”
- “Have mandatory regional data sharing between K–12s, CCCs, CSUs, UCs, and employers—the State must provide storage, security, and incentives.”

Emphasize Equity, Inclusiveness, Accessibility, and a Focus on Specific Populations

Prioritize equity to address an unlevel playing field experienced by the most marginalized and underserved students, families, and communities. Ensure equitable access, funding, learning modalities, program implementation, and opportunities. Prioritize equitable access to all programs and policies for students from families that have been historically underrepresented in higher education.

- “Have an equity-centered approach that prioritizes the most marginalized and underserved young people AND their families and communities.”
- “Incorporate the needs and access of all learning modalities for inclusive practice.”
- “Be inclusive of all students from historically underrepresented backgrounds, including first-generation students, BIPOC students, students with disabilities, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.”
- “Address opportunities for career changers.”
- “Recognize rural area impact when designing to scale programs properly and create equitable pathways for all communities.”
- “Address the unique barriers facing at-risk student populations such as justice-involved youth and foster youth.”

- “Explicitly commit to ensuring that LGBTQ+ students are safe and supported in schools—we must combat hostile school environments for LGBTQ+ students.”
- “Take into account the needs of [the] undocumented community, build support [for] them to be contractors or [to] own business[es].”

Focus on System-Level Change

Align education segments, employers, trades, military, and existing consortia to provide a student- and worker-centered system that emphasizes work-based learning and transition to employment.

- “Address regional, systematic structures to bring K–12, postsecondary, employers, trades, [and] military together within a system that supports work-based learning opportunities and a successful transition to employment.”
- “Include a student data-tracking structure from kinder[garten] through adulthood.”
- “Take apart institutional silos and the incentives that maintain them to build a truly student-centered system that allows all California youth and young adults to experience the life of educational choice and support that allow young people to live and breathe all of their days.”
- “Redesign the education system to be more responsive to business’s evolving needs.”

Specific Solutions to Include in the Master Plan for Career Education

Address the Needs of Adult Education/Nontraditional Learners

Create flexible systems that are welcoming and accessible to returning adult students. Elevate and support adult schools and continuing education programs.

- “Ensure flexibility in training schedules that provide accessibility for nontraditional learners.”
- “Develop a system that is welcoming to our returning adult students.”
- “Develop programming that doesn’t take years, but maybe weeks, to attain the training for the job (work) force.”
- “Provide equal funding to adult schools—current practices award the majority of funds to community colleges and not K–12 adult education.”
- “Our [K–12 adult school] campuses attract the target population, but there is a disproportionate amount of funds awarded to community colleges for workforce development.”

Strengthen Career Technical Education Pathways

Provide streamlined, secure, and sustainable career and technical education program funding and reporting.

- “Streamline the grant system to create sustainable, consistent, accountable funding sources that sustain all [career and technical education] programs statewide for the future.”
- “Provide ongoing funding rather than annual competitive grants so that we can develop strong, high-quality [career and technical education] programs with flexibility to meet unique regional and evolving workforce needs.”
- “Incentivize regional programs to gain economies of scale, especially for pathways with needs for high-cost equipment.”
- “Address the disparity in program offerings at different high schools. Some have many options for [career and technical education] pathways, while others have none or very limited options. Too dependent on individuals and not institutions.”
- “Look at regional models with proven industry engagement with education and [community-based organizations]—an example would be Regional Occupational Programs that have a proven model for over 50 years.”
- “Allow for [cost of living adjustment] increases to the WorkAbility grants—the increased cost of the staff to administer the grant is taken from the student wages.”

Provide More Access to Credit for Prior Learning and Work Experience

Expand credit for work experience and prior learning, including foreign degrees.

- “Specific policies or mandates to implement credit for prior learning, including foreign degrees.”
- “Alternative credentials, microcredentials, and experiential/prior learning that are recognized by industry employers.”
- “Support to transfer credentials from abroad.”

Inform Learners About Education and Career Options

Provide accessible tools that share information about careers, pathways, and work-based learning in multiple languages through multiple media sources and in culturally sensitive ways.

- “Provide information to all Californians across multiple media in many languages about how to access information about careers at different ages and to connect people to education and training at a variety of cost points.”
- “Create searchable regional clearinghouses that match workforce education/apprenticeship programs with employers, unions, and schools, so that students and workers see clear paths to better jobs.”

Integrate Career Education into Curriculum

Integrate career education, including financial literacy and workplace skills, into the curriculum starting in early grades. Identify career education graduation requirements and measures. Enable local approval of curricula.

- “Prepare students for flexibility—on and off ramps for career opportunities throughout their life.”
- “Career exploration in curriculum, starting in elementary school.”
- “Align learning goals between institutions (CCC to CSU and UC, K–12 to postsecondary ed).”
- “Change the California high school graduation requirements to include the completion of career readiness metrics, such as the development of education and career plans, and [the] development [of] proficiency in exercising essential skills (soft skills).”
- “Have an open-access curriculum that allows educational institutions to freely adopt curriculum without having to get it reapproved/accredited at the local level.”
- “Focused on updating educational code and Title 5 to remove barriers to getting innovative curriculum approved at the local level [rather] than state level to allow for swift implementation of programming desired by workforce partners.”

Strengthen Shared Data

Create and share a data system, with shared measures and definitions, that is aligned across systems and includes adult schools and employment data.

- “Leverage data sharing between agencies and segments to ensure greater access to public aid.”
- “Share data across systems with the same definition of data points and track the student across systems that share outcome measurements informed by growth

sectors, while ensuring information [and] navigation assistance reaches interest holders—student, family, educators, employers.”

- “Streamline reporting processes and data collection between all systems.”
- “Include people with disabilities as part of [diversity, equity, inclusion, and access] interest holder cohort and metric data.”

Create More Equitable Access to Dual Enrollment Opportunities

Expand equitable opportunities for dual enrollment, including revising requirements for TK–12 teachers to participate.

- “Support for K–12 teachers in meeting minimum [qualifications] to teach dual enrollment.”
- “Statewide support of scaling dual enrollment and aligned career development.”

Provide More Support for Educators

Increase salaries and provide other support for teachers (in TK–12, career and technical education, and postsecondary education), including credit on salary scale for industry training and providing funding to expand college and career staff.

- “Invest in increasing salaries for our educators so that we can attract and retain talent.”
- “Instructors be given credit for industry-specific training and years of experience on the teacher salary schedule.”
- “Make it easier to acquire [career and technical education] teachers at livable wages. Remove the extremely long wait process or accept prior experience in lieu of classes to get credentials. Pay more—current adult ed and [career and technical education] teachers make 40–60% of the salaries at comprehensive sites.”
- “Provide funding for additional college and career staff to support these initiatives. There is a lot of work to be done and there should be coordinators at every level, K–18.”
- “Create financial and accountability incentives for K–12 systems to expand high quality college and career advising. K–12 districts should care about their students’ outcomes after graduation!”
- “Start with supporting K–12 teachers so that they have smaller classes, more resources to teach, and not have them spread so thin that students are not gaining the skills that they need.”

Design More Flexible Pathways

Provide multiple pathways to career success, including noncollege options, that are aligned to industry needs, with on-ramps and off-ramps for learners of all ages.

- “Rethink degree and occupational pathway structures so that students of all ages can pursue them without barriers to entry or retention issues—this calls for funding throughout and intrusive support plus employer engagement.”
- “Build flexibility into preparing students for career pathways to allow for pivots—do not limit pathways/tracks to careers that are not a good fit for students.”
- “Pathways are aligned to regional industry needs.”
- “Allow for statewide blueprint for California’s future labor needs aligned to [career and technical education] pathways.”
- “Review of all pathways to promote transferability of skills to high wage careers.”

Expand Participation in Pre-apprenticeship/Apprenticeship/Work-Based Learning/Internships

Develop partnerships across education segments and between education and employers to provide paid work-based learning opportunities for students, either at the workplace or in school, providing transportation as needed. Incentivize employers to participate and provide equal access to these opportunities, regardless of geographic location or size of schools.

- “Prioritize incorporating PAID work-based learning opportunities IN SCHOOL (internships, apprenticeships, etc.).”
- “Enable transportation and paid internships in grant funding as opportunities for historically underserved youth to access all work-based learning programs.”
- “Incentivize employer participation in work-based learning opportunities ... get to a point where almost everyone wants ‘in’ and it becomes a privilege to support our state’s future workforce rather than a burden—need a mindset shift ... we are in this work together.”
- “Need a Memorandum of Understanding and partnership between K–12 and community colleges for Pre-Apprenticeship to Apprenticeship programs.”

Align Skills and Competencies

Establish a regional standard for skills and competencies rather than degrees, such as skills-based badges and stackable, industry-approved credentials.

- “Establish skills-based competencies that are transferable across any place that a learner/worker achieves that learning: schools K–16/CCC/CSU/UC ... nonprofits

training and learning ... work-based learning ... military ... through a statewide learner education record/skills wallet.”

- “Redesign educational goals in regards to Associate and Bachelor’s Degrees, Certificates, etc. and put more emphasis on skills and stackable certificates and include a learn and earn model that provides access and more affordability toward a successful and happy life.”
- “Establish a regional standard for skills and competencies that’s validated by employers, unions, industry, community organizations so it’s not just based on academics.”

Provide More Financial Support to Students

Expand student financial support for college by expanding eligibility for part-time students and providing support for expenses such as textbooks, transportation, food, housing, and childcare.

- “Make community colleges free for ALL (not just those privileged to be able to attend full time).”
- “Remove barriers for access to all learners, for example free college for adult learners who also need to work and can’t study full time, provide more childcare support, provide alternative options such as online classes, have more programs for middle income students.”
- “Include supportive services for textbooks, transportation, childcare, housing, and food.”

Considerations for Potential Actions

When community members engaged the four core concepts for the plan (Access and Affordability; Career Pathways; Hands-On Learning, Work-Based Learning, Apprenticeship, and Employer Partnerships; and State and Regional Coordination), similar themes emerged across the state and echoed feedback from the agencies. Participants focused on financial barriers, limited guidance on careers, disconnection between industry and education, lack of alignment between education and workforce training providers, and fragmentation of funding and data systems. Many contributors noted that current structures are particularly difficult to navigate for populations that historically have not had equitable access to education and workforce training, including people with disabilities, opportunity youth, immigrants, people who are justice

involved, and first-generation students (who are disproportionately Latino and African American).

However, the way these challenges manifest varies by education and workforce training systems. For example, TK–12 educators noted disparities in access to career information based on geographic location, socioeconomic status, and local resources. College practitioners noted that their institutions are not set up to fit the schedules of working adults. Employers raised similar points and noted that learning opportunities are splintered across systems that are complex and poorly coordinated, making it difficult for learners to gain the skills they need. Adult education providers emphasized challenges in the credentialing process for teachers, and community members shared that teachers didn't have adequate training to address the needs of various populations.

To ensure that the Master Plan for Career Education addresses the needs of learners, which evolve over their lifetimes, the sections below synthesize what participants identified as pain points and summarizes their ideas about a vision for the future in the state's education and training delivery systems.

TK–12

Pain Points

“You taught me how to walk, and to run, and to climb, and then you threw me in a pool.”

Student participant at a Master Plan for Career Education regional convening

In the regional design sessions, participants described how current structures reinforce the sense that students either choose to go to college or follow a separate pathway to prepare for a career. When students graduate from high school, most do not have a sense of potential careers or how the 21st century skills they are learning across the curriculum are valuable in the workplace. While efforts like the Golden State Pathways program, the Linked Learning approach, and dual enrollment have created opportunities for young people to simultaneously learn about careers and take rigorous courses that prepare them for college, most students do not benefit from these opportunities. For example, college and career advising, career and technical education pathways, and dual enrollment options differ significantly across districts.

Currently community colleges are seeking to help all high school students take 12 college units, given research showing that early college exposure has significant positive impact on college-going rates. However, despite the state's efforts to expand access to dual enrollment, Latino and African American students are less likely to participate. Furthermore, across all student types, there is little coherence terms of in the college classes they take through dual enrollment. When students successfully complete rigorous pathways, they struggle to find out how early college credit—whether for courses taken through dual enrollment or earned from scoring highly on Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate tests—will count toward their college major. When they enter college, despite assertions that they will be able to complete a degree in less time, and thus graduate with less debt, they often retake the college material they had mastered previously. In addition, participants underscored the lack of educators necessary to teach students, insufficient preparation for guiding students on college and career topics, and lack of training in areas such as trauma-informed care and supporting the needs of diverse types of students.

Vision for the Future

Participants described a future in which young learners' educational journeys include a broader emphasis on career and life skills across the curriculum. Learning incorporates opportunities to apply concepts to real-world contexts and careers and to develop skills of collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and problem solving that are essential to college and careers and respond to the specific needs of various student populations. All students are given the opportunity for structured career exploration, with hands-on learning integrated into coursework. Lessons are taught in an age-appropriate manner and address common stereotypes about education and career pathways. Classroom activities and work-based learning are co-designed with employers to better align the concepts taught in school and skills that are valued in the workplace. These pathways are also designed so students can pursue different opportunities throughout middle and high school to gain a better understanding of their interests and aptitudes without jeopardizing their ability to pursue other college or career options they may choose subsequently. As part of their financial literacy training, students learn about the costs of different education and workforce training options and how they can access financial aid and public benefits to make these opportunities affordable and minimize debt. In addition, parents and legal guardians are engaged from early grades to understand education and career options and college savings opportunities.

As a result, all students graduate high school understanding

- a range of possible career options and potential future earnings based on their choices;
- the education and workforce training pathways needed to meet their goals; and
- how to access different postsecondary options, whether they be college, shorter-term credentials, apprenticeships, or other technical training.

College Pathways

Pain Points

"Processes differ from place to place. There is a lack of consistency."

Participant at a Master Plan for Career Education regional convening

In the regional design sessions, participants described poor alignment between TK–12 and higher education. Despite pathways programs and transfer initiatives like the K–12 Strong Workforce Program, Guided Pathways, and associate degrees for transfer, the participants highlighted the challenge of inconsistencies in how prior learning is acknowledged, lack of mechanisms for measuring experiential skills, misaligned pathways, and complex application and onboarding processes. They underscored the lack of clear and accessible information for students regarding career options, the connection between education and work, and how to navigate career pathways. They also stressed the struggles students experience in affording college due to the high cost of fundamentals such as textbooks, housing, food, and childcare. Although most students must work to cover costs, they noted that college is not structured in a way that allows students to balance work and educational schedules.

Vision for the Future

Participants described a future in which college students have flexibility to pursue a bachelor's degree or to choose alternative options, such as certificates, associate degrees, or apprenticeships, that align with bachelor's degrees and job opportunities. This flexibility includes more consistent articulation of courses, both among colleges in the same system—such as community colleges—and between systems like community colleges and 4-year institutions. The cost of attendance is reduced because students get credit for college material mastered in high school. In addition, there are well-

defined processes to provide academic credit for learning in contexts like serving in the armed forces or attaining an industry credential. The process of applying to college is streamlined, so that less time is spent verifying transcript data and more resources are focused on helping students develop an academic and career plan and access the services they need such as financial aid and public benefits. Colleges coordinate at the state and regional levels to ensure there are enough seats available to allow students to train for in-demand careers and plentiful options for work-based learning across all majors. They also provide information that helps students translate the skills they gained in college to a career pathway, with clarity about how they might obtain additional education over time to advance in their chosen profession.

As a result, more students

- have greater access to in-demand pathways and understand career options based on specific majors;
- complete in less time because they have not had to take courses that teach skills they already have; and
- enter the workforce with minimal debt.

Ongoing Education and Workforce Training

Pain Points

"For 95 percent of people you need an 'earn while you learn' structure to not be buried with debt for the training."

Participant at a Master Plan for Career Education regional convening

In the regional design sessions, participants highlighted the many different systems that learners must navigate to access the training they need. Although efforts like the California Adult Education Program and the High Road Training Partnerships have sought to build stronger connections, participants highlighted the overall lack of articulation between workforce training and education systems. This lack of alignment makes it difficult for people in adult education—such as programs that prepare learners for GEDs or build their English proficiency—to continue to college certificate and degree programs. Participants noted that adult learners have insufficient access to support services that provide transportation, childcare, elder care, housing, and food security, which challenges their participation in both shorter-term and longer-term pathways. In addition, participants noted that when learners complete training

programs, they struggle to find high-quality jobs that pay livable wages. They indicated this was a function of the types of jobs that are available to people without degrees and a misalignment between training options and employer needs.

Participants described the barriers experienced by people who move to California from other countries, including language gaps and lack of recognition for credentials earned in other countries. They noted that learners often must repeat education and workforce training they already completed, leading to unnecessary hurdles in their career progression. In addition, participants flagged that system complexity and misalignment deepens equity gaps for other populations that are often marginalized within education and workforce training systems, such as individuals with disabilities, justice-involved people, foster youth, people who are unhoused, and opportunity youth.

Vision for the Future

Participants described a future in which adults and opportunity youth have access to information that helps them navigate the ambiguity in career paths so they understand their options for high-paying, in-demand occupations, the types of education and workforce training that will qualify them for these jobs, and financial and public benefit options that make it feasible to take time out of work for this training. Workforce training is co-designed with employers and offered in a more flexible manner, so that learners can balance learning, work, and family responsibilities. Offerings are tailored to the needs of specific populations. For example, language and technical skills are combined or work-based learning opportunities are offered that reflect universal design principles and are accessible for people with disabilities. Whenever possible, structures like apprenticeship allow learners to be paid as they master in-demand skills. Employers shift the emphasis of their hiring away from degrees as the primary qualification for jobs and instead use a Career Passport that shares certified skills, in addition to academic qualifications, to evaluate applicants.

As a result, more adult learners and opportunity youth

- understand career options based on their prior experience and current interests, including the education or training necessary for the next step in their career;
- receive supports that recognize their specific needs; and
- secure high-paying jobs.

State and Regional Coordination

Pain Points

"There are so many unaligned initiatives at the state level. It is hard to create synergy with so many varied expectations."

Participant at a Master Plan for Career Education regional convening

In the regional design sessions, participants frequently returned to the need for improved coordination. State agencies frequently work together to address joint priorities, such as the partnership between the California Department of Education and the California Community Colleges to create the California Career Technical Education State Plan or the support that CSUs and UCs have provided for K–16 regional collaboratives. However, there are many other opportunities for greater intersegmental work. Community members listed specific areas in which stronger coordination would benefit learners, including shared standards, aligned and more consistent funding, greater consistency for processes like recognizing courses for transfer, and tools that support career exploration and college advising.

Vision for the Future

Participants described a future in which education and workforce training options are aligned with industry and evolving employer needs, resulting in pathways to economic stability and prosperity. Planning, resource allocation, and infrastructure are coordinated and consolidated across various agencies and systems so that funding at the local level is more consistent and allows for a more sustainable focus on addressing equity gaps. Statewide and regional career councils support integrated planning, resource allocation, data management, and other critical activities to move away from the fragmentation and siloing of current systems.

As a result,

- funding is more consistent and long term so that institutions focus on structural barriers rather than addressing equity gaps through pilot programs.
- data and technical infrastructure are linked to create guidance tools that are more comprehensive; and
- educators, workforce training providers, and employers work together to create aligned curriculum and more work-based learning opportunities, which creates stronger education and training opportunities for Californians.

Next Steps

Between August and November 2024, these recommendations from public engagement will be discussed by the agencies, with input from constituency groups and continued meetings with the public. Wherever possible, the actions will reflect and accelerate the momentum of existing agency-led efforts.

The finalized Master Plan for Career Education will be completed by the end of 2024 and will provide recommendations on policy, practice, and resource changes to address structural barriers to prosperity in the short and long term. The Career Education Master Plan will provide an organizing framework that will extend into the next decade to link disparate efforts together to provide equitable access to career pathways and hands-on learning for Californians of all backgrounds.

Please refer to careereducation.gov.ca.gov/master-plan-engage for updates on the Master Planning process and additional opportunities to provide input.

A Final Note of Gratitude

The Governor's Office and WestEd thank all regional design session participants who dedicated time from their busy schedules and traveled long distances to offer their expertise, perspectives, and experiences to shape the Master Plan for Career Education. Constituents' contributions have been invaluable in ensuring that the Master Plan yields sustained, systemic change and that all Californians have equitable access to high-paying, fulfilling work.

Appendix A. Regional Design Session Sponsors

Local sponsors were essential in bringing together practitioners from across California to identify pain points and generate innovative ideas.

Southern Border

- Foundation for Grossmont and Cuyamaca Colleges
- Imperial Valley College (host site)
- Imperial Valley Community College District

Los Angeles/Orange County

- California State University, Long Beach (host site)
- Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
- Los Angeles Community College District
- Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation
- Los Angeles County Office of Education
- The Michelson 20 MM Organization
- Orange County Business Council
- Orange County Department of Education
- UNITE-LA

Sacramento—Capitol Region

- California State University, Sacramento (host site)
- Capitol Impact
- San Joaquin Delta College
- Valley Vision

Inland Empire

- California State University San Bernardino
- Growing Inland Achievement
- Inland Empire Community Foundation
- Inland Empire Economic Growth and Opportunity
- Inland Empire Labor Institute
- Inland Empire Regional K–16 Education Consortium

- Riverside Community College District
- Riverside County Office of Education
- San Bernardino Community College District
- San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools
- San Bernardino Valley College (host site)
- University of California, Riverside

Central Valley

- Central San Joaquin Valley K–16 Partnership
- Central Valley Community Foundation
- Fresno City College (host site)
- Fresno County Superintendent of Schools
- Fresno-Madera K–16 Collaborative
- Kern County Superintendent of Schools
- Kern Regional K–16 Education Collaborative
- State Center Community College District
- University of California, Merced
- We Will!

Bay Area

- All Home
- Bay Area K–16 Collaborative
- Chabot-Las Positas Community College District
- Sobrato Philanthropies
- University of California, Santa Cruz
- University of California, Santa Cruz Silicon Valley Extension (host site)

Far North (Shasta)

- North State Planning and Development Collective
- North State Together
- Shasta College (host site)

Far North (Arcata/Eureka)

- Arcata Economic Development Corporation
- California Center for Rural Policy
- Cal Poly Humboldt
- Eureka City Schools
- Eureka High School (host site)
- Redwood Coast K–16 Educational Collaborative

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