

# 2021-22 POLICY AGENDA

FALL RECESS 2020



*Now more than ever, California Community Colleges are indispensable to our state. Not only are they on the frontline of training the workforce critical to confronting the pandemic, but they also provide the lifeline to those displaced by the recession, helping those from all walks of life find a place in the new economy. Moreover, as our state and nation work to address systemic racism and social injustice, the community colleges are prioritizing equity as an immutable value for all. The state must affirm its commitment to community colleges by providing them the funding to serve as the economic and social catalysts needed for today. This is the soundest investment that California can make in its education, workforce, and communities. California's Community Colleges are essential in confronting the pandemic, educating and training Californians displaced by the recession, and addressing racial and income inequality.*

## AN EXPANSION OF REMOTE LEARNING

- **Online learning will drive our community colleges moving forward**

California Community Colleges quickly reacted to the pandemic by transitioning to remote learning immediately after Governor Newsom declared a state of emergency in March 2020. Colleges trained faculty on remote instruction, provided computers and WIFI to students and staff, and purchased software like Zoom and Canvas to make the transition as seamless as possible.

While our institutions had already offered a significant number of online courses, most students had never taken one. As such, many colleges embarked on a learning process of their own to help students succeed in this new environment, recognizing the combination of challenges, including technology, housing, and broadband access. Community colleges are continuing to expand and improve their remote learning offerings as both the pandemic and recession linger beyond initial expectations.

California's Community Colleges demonstrated their unparalleled ability to adapt to remote instruction and educational continuity in a pandemic. Our colleges will need further investments to continue to offer remote and online learning to the state's over 2.1 million community college students.

## ADDRESSING RACIAL INEQUITIES WITH EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

- **Communities of color should be a top priority**

While the pandemic has impacted everyone, communities of color and economically challenged populations have been severely harmed. As but one indicator of this, the New York Times reported

that nationally, Latinx and African Americans are three times more likely than their white counterparts to be impacted by COVID-19.

According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, fall enrollment for first-year students at public community colleges across the country dropped by 22.7%. Since the student population at California Community Colleges reflect a high level of diversity, any dip in enrollment would have a disproportionate impact on our state's communities of color.

California's efforts to improve racial equity will likely regress without a serious commitment to its community colleges. This must be a central component in the state's recovery plan and is critical to the health of all communities.

**California's Community Colleges are the most diverse institutions of higher education in the state. Any serious effort to address racial and income inequality must include an investment in providing expanded educational opportunities for students of color and low-income Californians.**

## **TRAINING CALIFORNIA'S DISPLACED WORKFORCE**

- **California's workforce will need a reinvestment**

According to the Legislative Analyst's Office, California experienced an unprecedented rise in joblessness from the pandemic-induced recession. While this may fluctuate over time with seasonal labor demand, we can anticipate that it will take years for certain sectors of the economy to recover.

Through critical investment in our workforce programs, California Community Colleges are positioned to train students already enrolled and retrain those displaced by the economy. Our colleges are the largest workforce training providers in the country, offering over 200 programs in Career Education taught by expert professionals committed to student success. Among the myriad of offerings are those demanded by today's health emergency, including respiratory therapy, nursing, and EMT.

As California learns from its mistakes in prior downturns, it is critical to maintain funding for these programs while ensuring sufficient capacity for all those desiring to enroll. Through continuous collaboration and data-driven decision-making, Career Education students are supported by faculty, staff, and administrators in their academic pathway to skills development and careers.

**We cannot repeat the mistake of the 2008 Great Recession that led to 600,000 Californians seeking retraining to re-enter the workforce, but were unable to do so as they were denied access to our public community colleges. Maintaining our capacity to educate and train nurses, EMT's, firefighters, and public safety officers are essential to an equitable recovery.**