

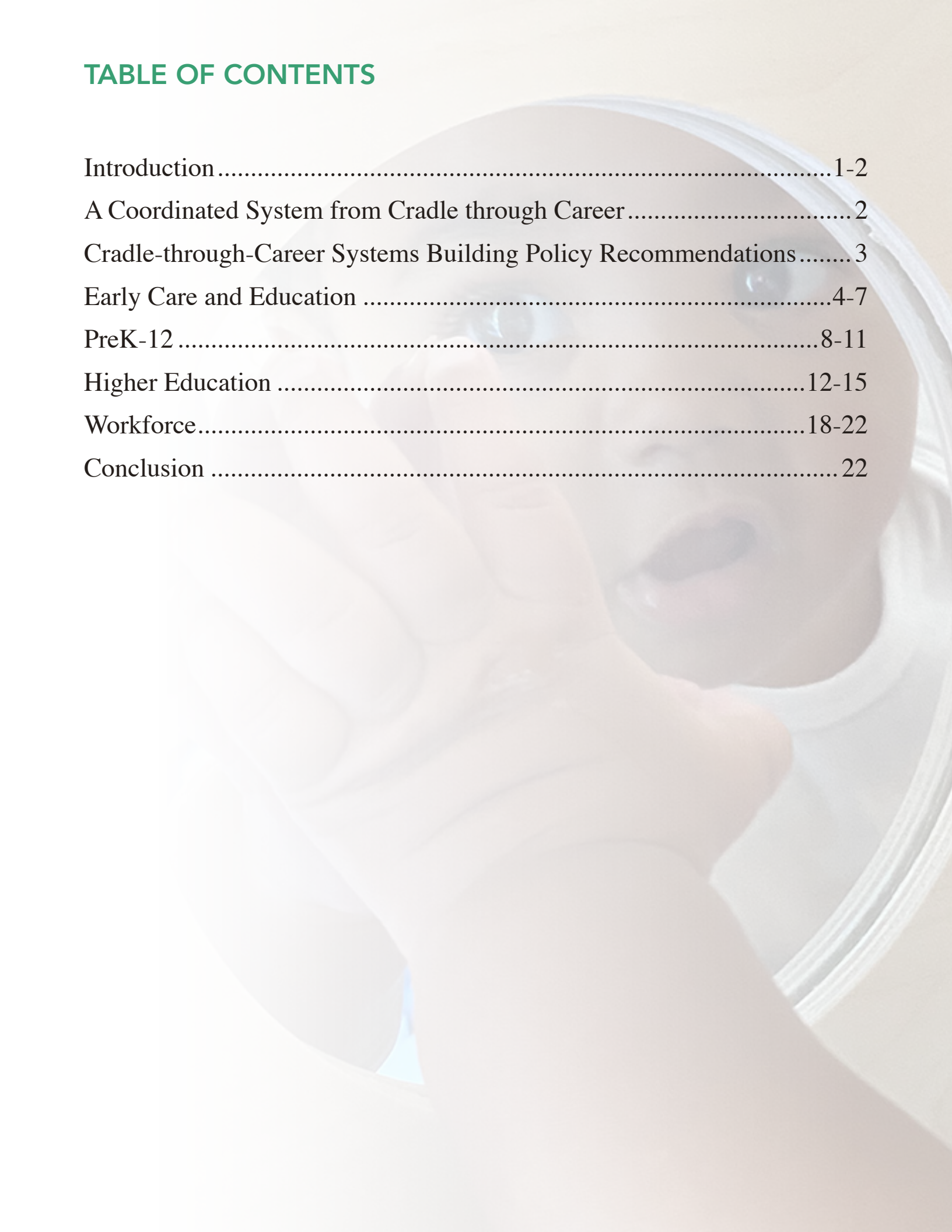


POLICY AGENDA 2022-2027:  
*A Coordinated System from Cradle-Through-Career in California*



**UNITE LA**  
Education Innovation Through Collaboration

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



Introduction .....	1-2
A Coordinated System from Cradle through Career .....	2
Cradle-through-Career Systems Building Policy Recommendations .....	3
Early Care and Education .....	4-7
PreK-12 .....	8-11
Higher Education .....	12-15
Workforce .....	18-22
Conclusion .....	22



California's public servants, including the Governor, State Superintendent of Public Instruction and State Legislators, have a significant responsibility and will have the power to uplift millions of Californians and brighten their futures.

The past few years have been marked by both incredible struggle for California's children, families and residents; and important progress towards better policies and systems change to serve them. Some key, recent successes for Californians include:

- Development and initial implementation of the Master Plan for Early Learning and Care (MPELC). Informed by the Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Education, the MPELC calls for the expansion of Paid Family Leave and in 2021, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed legislation increasing job protections;
- The \$2.7 billion investment in Universal Transitional Kindergarten, which will be phased in to universal availability to every 4-year-old in California, eventually serving up to nearly 400,000 students;
- The \$3 billion one-time Prop 98 investments for the expansion of Community Schools through the California Community Schools Partnership Grant;
- Passage of AB 1363 (Rivas) requiring a standard identification process for Dual Language Learners (DLLs) in California State Preschool Programs (CSPP), which will ultimately allow educators, programs, and policy-makers to strategically target supports for young DLLs;
- The multi-year \$5 billion investment over five years, with an initial \$1.8 billion for 2021-22 for the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program, which provides afterschool and summer school enrichment programs for transitional kindergarten through sixth grade.
- Passage of SB 156, which invested a historic \$6 billion to expand broadband infrastructure and enhance internet access for un- and under-connected households, over a multi-year period, including \$3.25 billion for middle-mile infrastructure, \$2 billion for last-mile projects, and \$750 million for local governments to access financing through a Loan Loss Reserve Fund;
- The Governor's proposed investment in college and career learning, particularly dual enrollment pathways;
- The \$1 billion investment for the Learning-Aligned Employment Program and Golden State Education and Training Program to support students and adult workers;
- The multi-billion dollar investments in the Golden State Teacher grants, teacher preparation residencies, the Classified School Employee Teacher Credentialing Program, and other grow-your-own

teacher credentialing programs to address teacher shortages and ensure that California's students are taught by highly qualified educators;

- The \$250 million investment to support regional TK-16 education collaboratives that create streamlined pathways from high school to postsecondary education and into the workforce;
- The Governor's establishment of an overarching goal of achieving 70 percent postsecondary degree and certificate attainment among working-aged Californians by 2030;
- Development of and initial implementation funding for Recovery with Equity: A Roadmap for Higher Education After the Pandemic, a set of interconnected recommendations aimed at ensuring that the opportunity for success and economic mobility is equitable and available to all; and
- Legislation and investments to establish a statewide, longitudinal data system for California that will provide data-informed tools to help students reach their college and career goals and deliver information on education and workforce outcomes.

While these successes should be celebrated, significant work remains. At UNITE-LA, we believe that our policymakers share a collective responsibility with all Californians, to identify the institutional and social changes necessary to promote equity and close existing and historic opportunity gaps. We are all responsible for transforming our institutions and systems so they support all students to reach their full potential. This necessitates a cradle-through-career approach to ensure California's education and workforce systems are focused on racial and social justice, and are better coordinated — from cradle through career — to create a seamless path for students across the whole developmental spectrum.

This cradle-through-career approach is especially important given the significant and ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), after the economic shutdown in March 2020, unemployment spiked to 16 percent across the state, and the overall state's economy lost 2.5 million jobs.<sup>1</sup> PPIC reported L.A. had the highest spike in unemployment in 2020 and a slower recovery throughout 2021 compared to other regions in the state.<sup>2</sup> Entering this

<sup>1</sup> How Did California's Economy Recover from COVID—and What Comes Next? (2022, March 9). Public Policy Institute of California. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <https://www.ppic.org/blog/how-did-californias-economy-recover-from-covid-and-what-comes-next/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

crisis, tremendous racial, economic and social inequities were already embedded in our institutions, and far too many individuals confronted the challenges of income, wealth and opportunity gaps. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted and exacerbated existing inequities. A comprehensive cradle-through-career approach is essential to ensure ALL Californian's rebound and benefit from a healthy, strong recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, the racial reckoning wrought by 2020's spotlight on systemic racism and anti-Blackness re-emphasized the extreme disparities by race, and highlighted the importance of focusing on dismantling anti-Black racism. Anti-Blackness is the key foundation of structural racism in this country in part because of the unique and enduring history of violence against — and dehumanization of — Black people. Because racism operates at individual, ideological, institutional and structural levels, it is present in every system of society. There is a need for a bold, courageous approach to address the underlying structural and systemic inequities based on race and other factors.

We have outlined 12 Principles for a New Economy that include key recommendations to begin this courageous approach. This cradle-through-career policy agenda builds upon these principles and outlines a pathway to a more successful future for California and its future generations.

## A Coordinated System from Cradle through Career

UNITE-LA seeks to uplift the belief in *Success For All* — all children and youth, regardless of race, gender, socio-economic status, immigration status and ability, have the capacity to achieve at high levels and realize their unique potential if given adequate support and **investments**. To arrive at this outcome requires advancing equity — dismantling structural and institutional racism and classism, allocating resources, and targeting strategies in a way that **advances equity** of opportunity and educational outcomes.

California's current segmented education and workforce development systems fail to effectively meet the diverse needs of all students, their families and their communities. The current systems are siloed, and many key programs, services and leaders in California are not coordinated in a way that centers students over institutions. This creates a system without smooth transitions between services and programs, and often means Californians are not supported to reach their full potential. Early care and education, PreK-12, higher education and workforce development systems must be better coordinated and aligned to more effectively uplift the individual beneficiaries of their work. Interagency connections must be strengthened, and employers and workforce development partners must be engaged to ensure California has a competitive, qualified and well-compensated workforce.



## Cradle-through-Career Systems Building Policy Recommendations

A coordinated system, from cradle through career, is essential to ensuring students are able to access the full range of services available to support their overall growth, development and ultimate success. The following are recommendations for California's leaders to implement to build a strong cradle-through-career system:

1. Support efforts that expand access to affordable high quality, ECE experiences and child care for infants, toddlers and preschoolers that build the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for school readiness.
2. Fully implement Gov. Newsom's Paid Family Leave (PFL) Task Force recommendations and continue and strengthen state and federal investments to the PFL program, including increased wage replacement and inclusion of all public sector employees.
3. Continue and strengthen the Social Emotional Learning Plan and the implementation of the Governor's Community Schools Partnership Program, so that every high-poverty school becomes a community school.
4. Fund efforts that ensure California's youth are globally competitive, such as policies and investments supporting Dual Language Learner (DLL) and English learner (EL) programs.
5. Fund demonstration projects and model programs to serve as effective tools for building the capacity of Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) faculty and preparation programs to effectively prepare the Early Childhood Education (ECE) workforce to support DLLs.
6. Fund seamless Linked Learning / Career Technical Education (CTE) pathways and dual enrollment between PreK-12 and community colleges.
7. Expand high school students' graduation options through creative partnerships with community colleges and with alternative schools, providing students with other ways to earn a high school diploma.
8. Fund Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) to collaborate with postsecondary student success teams to incorporate career advising and development strategies before students graduate from high school and align secondary and postsecondary advising systems.
9. Fund LEAs and IHEs to enhance student transitions between systems, including fiscally and by providing or guiding students to services.
10. Advocate for a National Career Readiness Initiative through an interagency initiative with Departments of Labor, Education and Commerce; and reflect this interagency alignment in California's relevant agencies.
11. Provide further funding and support for regional efforts to convene PreK-12 districts, IHEs, and employers to develop shared agendas for postsecondary student success; expand these efforts to include institutions and partners from birth-to-five systems.
12. Incentivize greater collaboration among ECE, PreK-12, adult education, higher education and workforce development boards through specific efforts such as dual enrollment programs, P-3, transition courses and bridge programs, aligned curricula, and improved articulation.
13. Fully fund and develop the state's new cradle-through-career data system.
14. Implement structures for statewide attainment of certificates, credentials, credit for prior learning and degrees that support the needs of state and regional economies and individuals in the workforce.
15. Fund increased facilities' infrastructure, cradle through career.
16. Eliminate digital redlining through increased investments in broadband adoption in un- and under-connected communities.
17. Advocate for reform and to modernize the federal immigration system to provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, including but not limited to essential workers, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) beneficiaries.
18. Continue to develop and implement policies that dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.



## EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

Young children thrive when they experience supportive and nurturing interactions with the adults in their lives. In fact, some researchers propose that “responsive and supportive relationships between adults and children are the active ingredients of children’s development.”<sup>3</sup> Ensuring that all of California’s children have access to high-quality early care and education (ECE) opportunities based on their needs and their families’ choices is paramount. Giving all California’s children a strong foundation will result in a compounding benefit to their educational success, and will maximize the impact of downstream investments in later stages of the cradle-through-career continuum.

To do this, California must pursue the following recommendations.

### **Recommendation 1: Increase access to early education opportunities that meet families’ needs, especially for infants and toddlers.**

COVID-19 magnified and exacerbated California’s early care and education challenges. Estimates show that between January 2020 and January 2021, California lost 4,873 licensed child care centers, a 33-percent decrease, and 3,635 licensed family child care programs, 14-percent decrease.<sup>4</sup> One in four U.S. women have left the labor market since the pandemic began, many citing lack of child care as the reason. And one in four women are considering leaving the workforce or downshifting their careers due to the impacts of COVID-19.<sup>5</sup>

Statewide, licensed child care is available to only a quarter of families.<sup>6</sup> As of 2018, 51 percent of Americans — and 58 percent of Latino families, 60 percent of rural families, and 55 percent of low-income families — lived in a child care desert.<sup>7</sup> Families are struggling to access the affordable and high-quality ECE opportunities their children deserve. This is particularly true for many low-income families who work multiple jobs and nontraditional work hours. California has an opportunity to support equity for children and families by increasing access to quality programs and services. In addition, by increasing paid family leave, California can enable more families to foster their own children’s development.

<sup>3</sup> Winters, Dana, J. Li (2019). Appreciating and Growing the Active Ingredient in Early Childhood Education” Bridging Research and Practice Exchange. Jan./Feb. Retrieved April 8, 2022, from <https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1566311676/isacsorg/qeqym9feb88z1uvyxust/ChildCareExchangecom-SIDanaJunlei.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Doocy, S., Kim, Y., Montoya, E., & Chávez, R. (2021, April 21). The Consequences of Invisibility – Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. Retrieved April 8, 2022, from <https://csce.berkeley.edu/publications/report/the-consequences-of-invisibility-covid-19-california/>

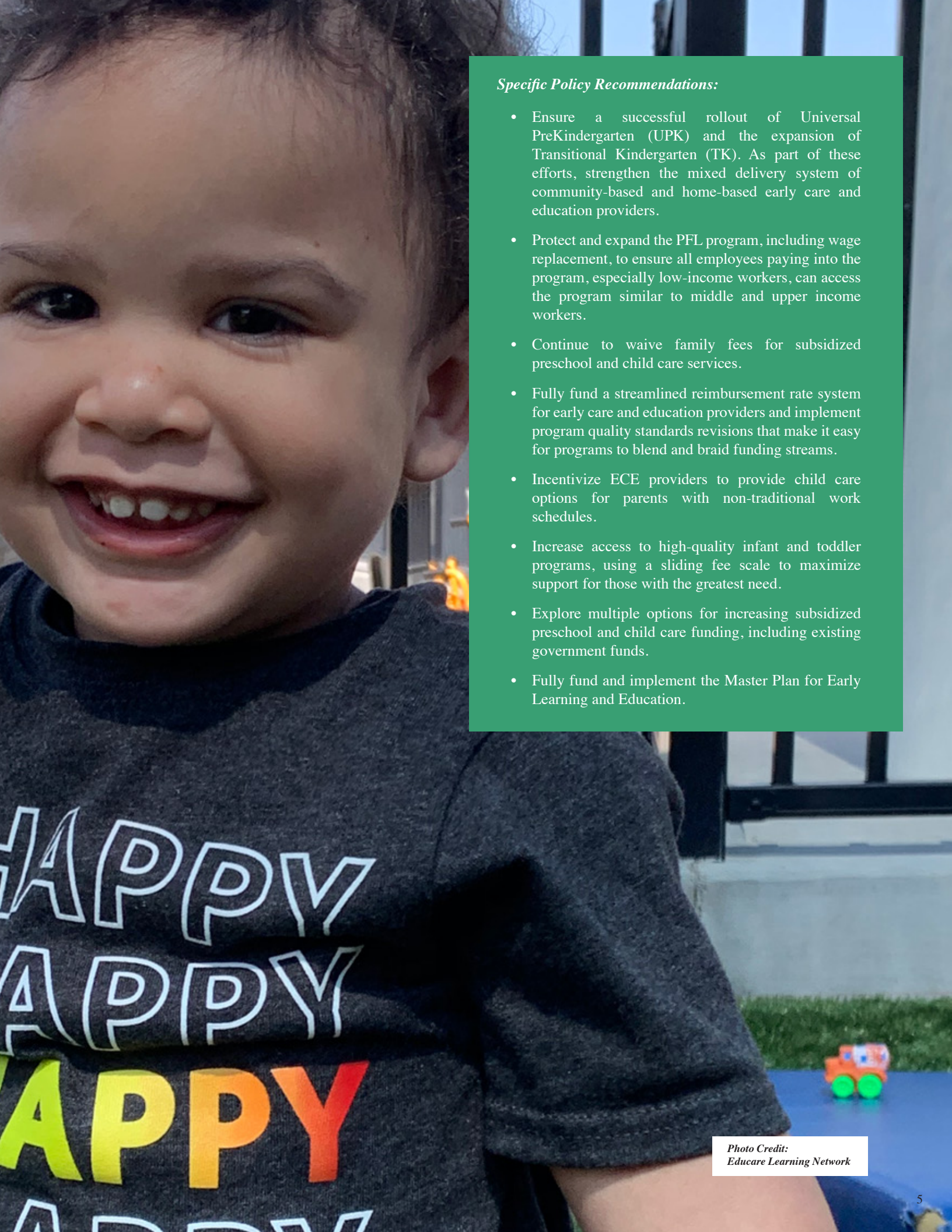
<sup>5</sup> Seven charts that show COVID-19’s impact on women’s employment. (2021, March 8). McKinsey. Retrieved April 8, 2022, from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/seven-charts-that-show-covid-19s-impact-on-womens-employment>

<sup>6</sup> The Economics Of Early Childhood: ‘You’re There For The Kids...Not For The Money’. (2021, June 9). LAist. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <https://laist.com/news/education/child-care-unfiltered-economics-early-childhood-los-angeles-california>

<sup>7</sup> Kenney, C. (2018, December 6). America’s Child Care Deserts in 2018. Center for American Progress. Retrieved April 9, 2022, from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/americas-child-care-deserts-2018/>







### *Specific Policy Recommendations:*

- Ensure a successful rollout of Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) and the expansion of Transitional Kindergarten (TK). As part of these efforts, strengthen the mixed delivery system of community-based and home-based early care and education providers.
- Protect and expand the PFL program, including wage replacement, to ensure all employees paying into the program, especially low-income workers, can access the program similar to middle and upper income workers.
- Continue to waive family fees for subsidized preschool and child care services.
- Fully fund a streamlined reimbursement rate system for early care and education providers and implement program quality standards revisions that make it easy for programs to blend and braid funding streams.
- Incentivize ECE providers to provide child care options for parents with non-traditional work schedules.
- Increase access to high-quality infant and toddler programs, using a sliding fee scale to maximize support for those with the greatest need.
- Explore multiple options for increasing subsidized preschool and child care funding, including existing government funds.
- Fully fund and implement the Master Plan for Early Learning and Education.

*Photo Credit:*  
Educare Learning Network

**Recommendation 2: Increase compensation for ECE professionals.**

As the economy continues its path to recovery and parents return to work, it will be critical to retain as many existing ECE educators and leaders as possible, while also building a sustainable pipeline of talent to expand access to early education for more families. To do this, we must ensure that these professionals are paid a professional wage to keep them in the field.

According to surveyed adults in L.A. County, an overwhelming majority of adults say child care workers should be paid a living wage with benefits.<sup>8</sup> Yet, this is far from the current reality. In Los Angeles County, where the average annual salary for a kindergarten teacher is about \$66,000 (excluding benefits), early educators barely earn above minimum wage on average.<sup>9</sup>

As California seeks to build back its workforce of early childhood professionals, it has an opportunity to ensure that its approach advances equity for the workforce by addressing wages.

<sup>8</sup> Public Policy Institute of California Statewide Survey (April 2017). Retrieved April 9, 2022, from [http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S\\_417MBS.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S_417MBS.pdf)  
<sup>9</sup> UNITE-LA: The Economic Benefits of a Professional Early Care and Education Workforce in Los Angeles County. Prepared by Beacon Economics. Pg 19. Retrieved April 15, 2022 from [https://d3n8a8spro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitela/pages/5156/attachments/original/1610412626/Unite-LA\\_ECE\\_Economic\\_Benefits\\_Report\\_-\\_digital.pdf](https://d3n8a8spro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitela/pages/5156/attachments/original/1610412626/Unite-LA_ECE_Economic_Benefits_Report_-_digital.pdf)  
<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Pg 20

*Specific Policy Recommendations:*

- Ensure the single reimbursement rate structure results in higher wages for the ECE profession, moving towards parity with kindergarten teacher salaries, benefits and working conditions.
- Explore tax credits and wage supplements at the state level to increase compensation for the ECE workforce, particularly for those with highly needed competencies, like early childhood special education and bilingual education.
- Reinstate and increase the Early Learning and Care Workforce Development Grants Program to rebuild and expand workforce capacity to support California’s children and families.
- Fund and develop effective policies and practices to ensure the current early childhood workforce can fully participate in an environment of higher standards and education and training requirements, accompanied by commensurate compensation, benefits and working conditions, as specified above.

**Estimated Hourly Wages in Los Angeles County, 2018 <sup>10</sup>**



Source: American Community Survey Public Microdata Samples, 3-year pooled estimates. Analysis by Beacon Economics





Photo Credit:  
Educare Learning Network

**Recommendation 3: Ensure authentic parent choice and a strong start for California’s youngest learners by supporting all programs to meet high-standards.**

As noted above, the quality of caring, nurturing and responsive adult-child interaction matters to child development. Nearly 90 percent of brain growth happens by the time children turn five.<sup>11</sup> In this time, cognitive, social and emotional development is progressing while language skills, executive functions, and social development also become more refined. ECE experiences that nurture this development strengthen children’s overall brain architecture.<sup>12</sup>

These types of high-quality experiences can happen in every setting — a preschool center, family child care home or TK classroom (mixed delivery of care) — but each setting must be supported by effective policies, program standards and infrastructure. A high-quality, early education experience includes foundational components such as: early learning standards and curricula that address the whole child; assessments that comprehensively look at child development in authentic and responsive ways, and are used to inform instruction; well-prepared professionals who receive ongoing support; support for multilingual learners and children with special needs; and meaningful family engagement.<sup>13</sup> As California implements UPK and increases access to high-quality infant and toddler services, it must also ensure all programs receive support for meeting high quality standards and are governed by evidence-based policies.

<sup>11</sup> Early childhood brain development has lifelong impact. (n.d.). Arizona PBS. Retrieved April 22, 2022, from <https://azpbs.org/2017/11/early-childhood-brain-development-lifelong-impact/>

<sup>12</sup> For more information on the brain architecture, visit the President and Fellows of Harvard College web page for Brain Architecture at <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>

<sup>13</sup> To learn more about the body of research examining essential elements of quality, read “The Building Blocks of High-Quality Early Childhood Programs” via the Learning Policy Institute’s Early Childhood Learning web page at <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/building-blocks-high-quality-early-childhood-education-programs>

**Specific Policy Recommendations:**

- Establish a preschool through third grade (P-3) credential and make adjustments to workforce preparation programs, ensuring any new requirements value and privilege the experience and knowledge of the current workforce.
- Provide financial assistance for ECE teachers to increase their knowledge, competencies and qualifications, while maintaining and further promoting the diversity of ECE professionals.<sup>14</sup>
- Ensure California’s program quality standards are evidence-based and support high quality, then evaluate and improve the state’s quality improvement infrastructure at the state and local levels and create financial incentives for continuous improvement efforts.
- Ensure all state-subsidized programs have access to improvement supports, including coaching for teachers.
- Incentivize collaboration between the mixed delivery system and Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) implementing UPK, including strengthening preschool through third grade (P-3) alignment within school districts.

<sup>14</sup> Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education. (n.d.). The National Academies Press. Retrieved April 29, 2022, from <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/24984/transforming-the-financing-of-early-care-and-education>



## PREK-12

The PreK-12 system — the students, families, educators and education professionals — has suffered under enormous strain and stress through the COVID-19 pandemic. This is especially true in already underserved communities. As policymakers address the pandemic and its aftermath, there is an opportunity to implement evidence-based, equity-focused approaches to education and to rebuild systems to strengthen learning opportunities for all students.

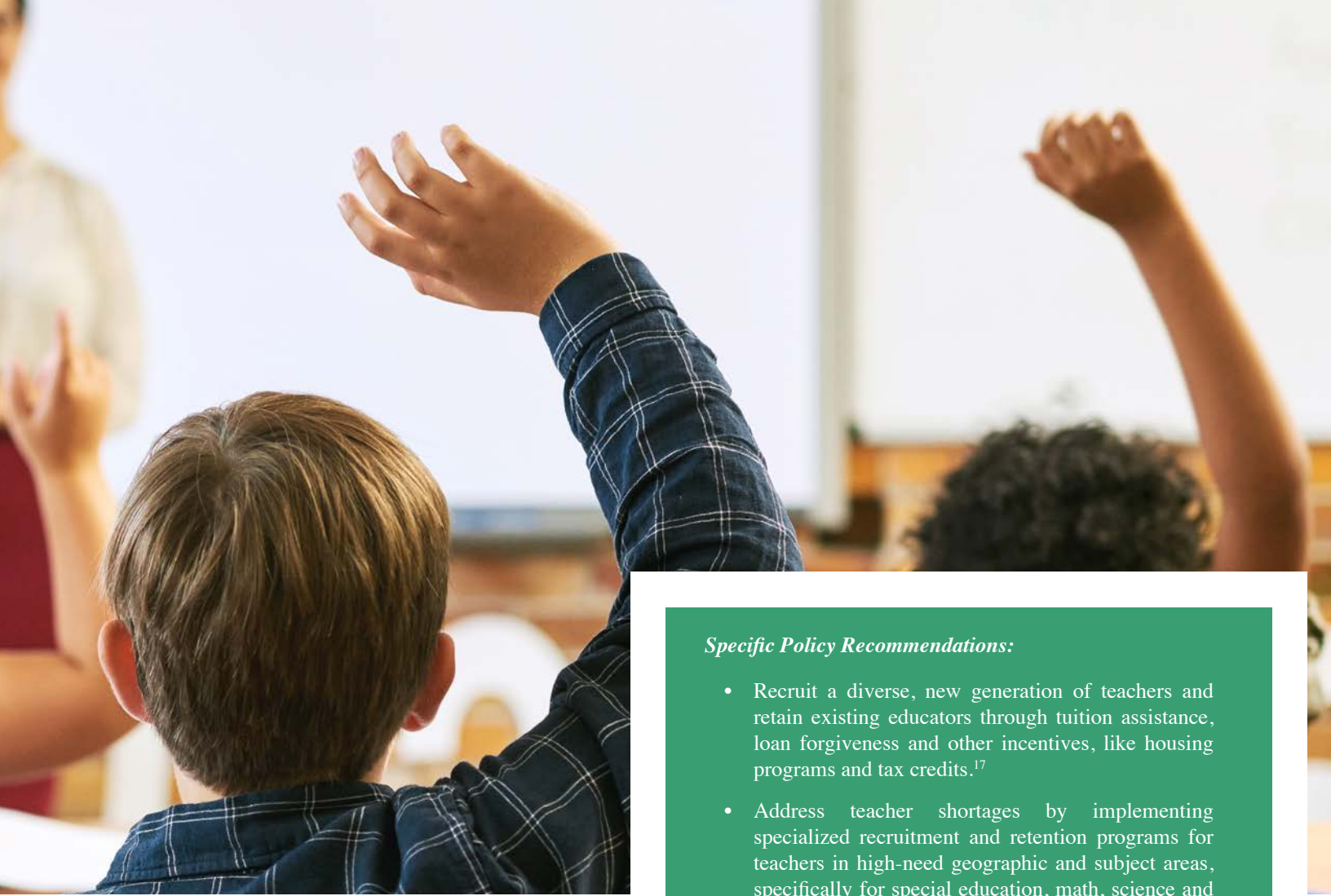
### **Recommendation 1: Ensure students' PreK-12 learning experiences build upon and amplify strong early learning foundations.**

Positioned on a strong foundation of early learning experience, California's children should continue their learning trajectory in a PreK-12 system that inspires meaningful learning, responds to student needs, and upholds high expectations while supporting students to reach them.

### *Specific Policy Recommendations:*

- Adopt and implement a P-3 teaching credential and a P-3 leadership certificate for principals and other administrators, recognizing the continuum of developmentally appropriate early learning experiences.
- Ensure the implementation of universal TK includes a focus on developing support mechanisms for shared professional development for early educators and early elementary teachers along the P-3 continuum.
- Continue to invest in UPK planning and implementation grants for both LEAs and community based organizations; and shift the focus of these future investments to planning around P-3 alignment.
- Capitalize on the ease of language acquisition in the early years by funding dual language programs across the P-3 continuum.





### Recommendation 2: Invest in educators.

According to the Learning Policy Institute, investments in instruction, especially in high-quality teachers, appear to leverage the largest marginal gains in performance.<sup>15</sup> The pandemic has exacerbated teacher shortages, particularly in high-need subjects and geographies. According to data from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC), the number of credentials authorized by the commission has declined in recent years, and the number of teachers with short-term or emergency credentials has increased.<sup>16</sup> Increases in teacher retirements and resignations, alongside a limited supply of candidates and a need for more teaching positions, led to unusually high levels of vacancies in several districts, particularly in low-income communities, and exacerbated the gap in the diversity of the teaching workforce and the students they serve. To ensure all students graduate high school ready for college, fulfilling careers and lifelong learning, California must continue to invest in that which has the most direct impact on student achievement, the educators and educational staff who provide daily support and instruction to students.

<sup>15</sup> Darling-Hammond, L. (2019, April 9). Investing for Student Success: Lessons from State School Finance Reforms. Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved April 9, 2022, from <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/investing-student-success-school-finance-reforms-report>

<sup>16</sup> Teacher Supply- Credentials. (n.d.). California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. Retrieved April 8, 2022, from <https://www.ctc.ca.gov/commission/reports/data/edu-supl-creds>

### *Specific Policy Recommendations:*

- Recruit a diverse, new generation of teachers and retain existing educators through tuition assistance, loan forgiveness and other incentives, like housing programs and tax credits.<sup>17</sup>
- Address teacher shortages by implementing specialized recruitment and retention programs for teachers in high-need geographic and subject areas, specifically for special education, math, science and DLLs/English learners.
- Create incentives for greater articulation between community colleges and teacher preparation programs, allowing teacher candidates to begin teacher training coursework and student-teaching experience while enrolled in community college so that they can transfer credits into college credential programs.
- Increase and improve licensure reciprocity and cross-state pensions or portable retirement benefit plans to allow veteran teachers to move from other states.
- Create supportive teaching environments by strengthening induction programs and by increasing coaching opportunities, mentorship opportunities and creative collaborative structures for shared learning and planning.
- Inspire and foster long-term agreements between districts and unions to respect hard-won seniority rules while reaching creative solutions to attract experienced and effective teachers and administrators to high-need schools and subjects.

<sup>17</sup> According to Edsource research from May 2019, California teachers on average earn 16.3 percent less than other college graduates, making it the state with the 32nd-highest wage gap in the nation. Freeberg, L. (2019, May 1). Wage gap between teachers and other college graduates exacerbates teacher shortages. EdSource. <https://edsource.org/2019/wage-gap-between-teachers-and-other-college-graduates-exacerbates-teacher-shortages/611728>



**Recommendation 3: Strengthen local planning, decision-making and implementation capacity to meet the needs of California’s diverse students and communities.**

California’s local control approach to education is a strength. While most California residents and public-school parents are not yet familiar with the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), majorities are in favor of LCFF after hearing a brief description.<sup>18</sup> Now more than ever, California needs to bolster local capacity. The impacts of the pandemic have taken different forms in different communities and state policy must support local capacity to respond. For example, California is estimating a 9 percent drop in PreK-12 enrollment, with some counties projected to decrease by double that amount, by 2030. While the COVID-19 pandemic may have accelerated these decreases, LEAs and the Legislature can lessen the impact of declining enrollment through structural funding changes. Now, more than ever, local PreK-12 systems need the support, investment and autonomy to respond.

<sup>18</sup> Save the Children, *Early Steps to School Success* (Washington, D.C.: Save the Children, 2015).

*Specific Policy Recommendations:*

- Support efforts that address LEAs declining enrollment.
- Create a networked improvement system across California that allows all schools and districts to improve by learning from the successes and challenges of others.
- Fortify local control and capacity through prioritizing funding increases to LCFF funding and limiting the expansion of categorical ongoing spending.





**Recommendation 4: Foster student engagement and motivation by connecting their learning to real-world applications and authentic experiences.**

Connecting students' education to real-world application supports increased levels of motivation and engagement. This can be achieved through in-classroom practices such as project-based learning or career pathways, and through out of school time (OST) experiences after school, in the summer, and during intersessions.

*Specific Policy Recommendations:*

- Expand and strengthen OST programming that builds science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) and 21st century skills.
- Expand career pathway programs that combine real-world work experience (work-based learning experiences) with classroom instruction to engage students in their own learning and facilitate their success in college and career.
- Ensure students who have been/are justice involved have a pathway to high school graduation and create incentives, such as diversion programs or commuted sentences for high school graduation or other educational attainment.
- Increase the number of school counselors to facilitate connections to CTE programs, college opportunities, work-based learning experiences and career advising; support professional development for counselors on how to effectively facilitate these connections.





# HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is the primary pathway to many high-wage careers, providing for upward socioeconomic mobility through career advancement and higher earnings. Higher education also plays a pivotal role in the development of the problem solvers, innovators and inventors needed to address 21st century problems and maintain global competitiveness.<sup>19</sup> Through the California Community Colleges (CCC), California State Universities (CSUs), the Universities of California (UCs), and numerous high-quality, private/nonprofit institutions, California has built an extensive system to prepare students for continuing education and/or workforce and careers. However, our decentralized governance structure no longer responds to the current demands of a growing population, changing workforce and evolving employer needs. California needs to be responsive to this and to integrate better student support services and systems to account for the true cost of college in order to see students through to graduation and into an economically relevant graduate program or career.

Most students in California go to postsecondary institutions in the regions where they live. This makes it critical to ensure postsecondary institutions are aligned with regional workforce needs. To deliver on its promise to prepare California's workforce for current economic demands and to develop the next generation of innovators, California's [Recovery with Equity: A Roadmap for Higher Education After the Pandemic](#) lays out a clear and strong vision for higher education systems that are aligned with today's population and workforce.

<sup>19</sup> Baum, S., Ma, J., & Payea, K. (2013). Education Pays, 2013: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society. Trends in Higher Education Series. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <https://research.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/education-pays-2013-full-report.pdf>

## Recommendation 1: Fully implement California's vision for its public higher education systems and establish realistic targets towards meeting the state's proposed credential and degree attainment goal.

California's IHEs make the state a beacon for innovation and knowledge-creation, creating one of the strongest and largest economies nationally and globally. While the Governor has established an overarching goal of achieving 70 percent postsecondary degree and certificate attainment among working-aged Californians by 2030 (a recommendation of the Governor's Council on Postsecondary Education), research indicates the state is not on track to meet the growing economic demand and will be short 1.1 million college educated workers by 2030.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> PPIC Statewide Survey: Californians and Higher Education. (n.d.). Public Policy Institute of California. Retrieved April 29, 2022, from <https://www.ppic.org/publication/ppic-statewide-survey-californians-and-higher-education-november-2017/>

### Specific Policy Recommendations:

- Set state and regional interim targets to guide public higher education systems in addressing the state's postsecondary degree and certificate attainment needs.
- Establish a strong and effective Higher Education Coordinating Body to assess progress towards goals and targets; and to guide investments, policies and collaborations among public, private (nonprofit and for-profit) institutions of higher education and other relevant bodies and stakeholders. Position this new body as a partner to – and not a competitor of – regional collaborative efforts.
- Establish mechanisms to review system-progress at regular intervals, make course corrections as needed, and capture information about the return on the state's higher education investments.





## Recommendation 2: Close attainment gaps and improve outcomes for underserved, underrepresented and non-traditional student populations.

According to California Competes, in 2013, approximately one-third (36 percent) of bachelor's degree recipients were White, while roughly one-fifth were Latino and Asian (22 percent and 21 percent, respectively), and only a small portion (four percent) were Black.<sup>21</sup> This compares to 2013 census data that show the distribution of non-whites in California includes 36 percent of the population identifying as Latino, 14 percent as Asian, six percent as Black, and one percent as Native Hawaiian and American Indian.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, public institutions of higher education have seen considerable declines in enrollment from pre-pandemic levels. Notably, the California Community College System saw an 11.7 percent decrease in enrollment in 2020, followed by a 9.9 percent decrease in 2021.<sup>23</sup> The biggest declines were among Black students, Native American students, male students, and students who are outside of what is considered traditional college-going age.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Mind the Gap: Delivering on California's Promise for Higher Education. (n.d.). California Competes. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <https://californiacompetes.org/degree-gap/CC-DegreeGapReport.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Term Enrollment Estimates, Fall 2021. (2021, Fall). National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Retrieved April 7, 2022 from [https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CTEE\\_Report\\_Fall\\_2021.pdf](https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CTEE_Report_Fall_2021.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> California community college enrollment drops below 2 million students, more than previously reported. (2021, November 4). EdSource. Retrieved April 8, 2022 from <https://edsources.org/2021/california-community-college-enrollment-drops-below-2-million-students-more-than-previously-reported/663225>

### Specific Policy Recommendations:

- Set state and regional goals and interim targets for closing college completion gaps among racial/ethnic groups and for low-income and first-generation students.
- Develop better education-to-occupation pathways for student populations with some college, but no degree.
- Develop better PreK-12 to postsecondary pathways for students, utilizing financial aid literacy, application support, dual admission, and promise programs.
- Increase opportunities for Dreamers/undocumented youth, such as opportunities to “earn and learn” and postgraduation supports.<sup>25</sup>
- Implement policies that remove collateral consequences of criminal conviction that reduce access to college, financial aid, employment and licensing for people with criminal records.<sup>26</sup>
- Target investments to support students in re-enrolling in postsecondary programs in light of COVID-19 and other systemic barriers, such as financial strain or program availability.

<sup>25</sup> According to the Migration Policy Institute, there were 197,900 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Recipients in California as of September 2017. Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS), 2010-14 ACS pooled, and the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), with legal status assignments by James Bachmeier and Colin Hammar of Temple University and Jennifer Van Hook of The Pennsylvania State University, Population Research Institute; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), “Approximate Active DACA Recipients as of September 4, 2017.”

<sup>26</sup> Racial disparities in California's prison system have a detrimental impact on communities of color. At the end of 2016, 29% of the male prisoners in state prisons were Black, while only 6% of the state's male residents were Black. The incarceration rate for Black men is 4,180 per 100,000. For Latino men the rate is 1,028 per 100,000. White men are imprisoned at a rate of 420 per 100,000. California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation: Monthly Total Population



### Recommendation 3: Make higher education accessible and affordable.

Access to higher education opportunities is often limited by the expense of those opportunities. Currently, the average cost of a four-year, postsecondary institution for first-time, full-time undergraduates is \$35,331 per student per year.<sup>27</sup> The average cost of college has had an annual growth rate of 6.8 percent and has more-than doubled in the 21st century.<sup>28</sup> When factoring student loan interest and loss of income into the cost of a bachelor's degree, the ultimate cost can exceed \$400,000.<sup>29</sup> In 2022, student loan debt in the nation totals \$1.749 trillion and in 2020, private student loan debt increased by \$16.8 billion or 14 percent.<sup>30</sup> Across the country, 43 percent of college attendees report that they did incur some type of educational debt, meaning less than half of college attendees are responsible for carrying the significant national debt statistics.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Hanson, M. (2022, March 29). Average Cost of College [2022]: Yearly Tuition + Expenses. EducationData.org. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <https://educationdata.org/average-cost-of-college>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Hanson, M. (2022, March 28). Student Loan Debt Statistics [2022]: Average + Total Debt. EducationData.org. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <https://educationdata.org/student-loan-debt-statistics>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

#### Specific Policy Recommendations:

- Target financial aid investments to students and families with greatest financial need.
- Continue to expand need-based financial aid to cover a greater share of non-tuition costs, addressing postsecondary students' basic needs, such as housing, food security, and access to technology and broadband.
- Modernize the Cal Grant program, with an equity lens, to better-serve today's students, including adults returning to finish degrees/upgrade skills and students with dependents.
- Develop funding structures that incentivize California higher education systems to create efficiencies that result in cost savings and minimize the financial burden on families.
- Expand programming, such as dual enrollment, which allows students to earn cost-free credits, prepares them for college, expands accessibility, and reduces time in college.
- Support "credit for prior learning" and other competency-based education models and pursue other flexible and adaptive education, especially for non-traditional students (for example, through online college or reverse transfers).
- Support federal student loan awareness and forgiveness efforts as they support equity and relate to affordability, upward mobility and the value of education.





**Recommendation 4: Improve higher education accountability and transparency through better alignment and data.**

We can better support students to complete certifications, credentials, and degrees by aligning data systems and establishing data-sharing infrastructure that can be utilized both for targeted supports and interventions, specifically and locally, but also for continuous improvement of higher education systems more generally. It is critical to create greater efficiencies in these data systems to allow for better tracking of student outcomes as a means of informing system improvements. Data systems alignment can also support smoother transfers and transitions for students.

*Specific Policy Recommendations:*

- Expand Associate Degrees for Transfer (ADT), including through the development of an applied ADT pathway linked to recognized, applied baccalaureate degrees in high-demand, high-growth industry sectors.
- Improve articulation between career/occupational training and higher education in order to recognize prior learning and existing skills to accelerate progress toward a credential or degree.
- Require all school districts and postsecondary institutions to align with statewide data systems, like the California College Guidance Initiative (CCGI) and the Cradle-through-Career Data System, making student level data more accurate and accessible.
- Ensure data about credentials are made publicly available, searchable, comparable and interoperable using open specifications and linked data formats that are comprehensible and actionable.













## WORKFORCE

Implementing a coordinated, equitable cradle-through-career system will result in a more competitive, qualified and well compensated workforce in California. It will create a workforce capable of driving innovation and economic development, and will begin to address the racial and social justice disparities seen in current workforce outcomes. Through regional partnerships with communities, California must support active (re-)engagement and inclusion of opportunity youth, immigrants, displaced adult workers, justice-involved individuals and other populations who experience high barriers to workforce development opportunities. These efforts should focus on developing policies and systems that give individuals the ability to demonstrate competencies and earn credit for prior learning and experience.





**Recommendation 1: Take an innovative, workforce-focused, skills-based approach to poverty reduction.**

Rates of poverty in California, and Los Angeles in particular, vary greatly along racial and geographic lines. According to the 2021 California Poverty Measure<sup>32</sup> estimates, more than a third of California residents were poor or near poor in 2019 and the share of Californian families in deep poverty (with less than half the resources needed to meet basic needs) was 4.6 percent.<sup>33</sup> Intergenerational poverty is poverty that is perpetuated across generations of families instead of being triggered by a specific situation and often leads to the destabilization of entire neighborhoods and communities.

Increasing access to authentic, practice-based skill-building opportunities can set individuals on a path to change their life trajectory and lift them, and their families, out of poverty.

<sup>32</sup> The California Poverty Measure is a joint project of the Public Policy Institute of California and the Stanford University Center on Poverty and Inequality. It incorporates the changes in costs and standards of living since the official poverty measure was devised in the early 1960s and accounts for geographic differences in the cost of living across the state. It also factors in tax credits and in-kind assistance that can augment family resources and subtracts medical, commuting, and child care expenses.

<sup>33</sup> Poverty in California. (n.d.). Public Policy Institute of California. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from [https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/JTF\\_PovertyJTF.pdf](https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/JTF_PovertyJTF.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> The Public Policy Institute of California offers an interactive dashboard of poverty rates across demographic groups in California, according to the California Poverty Measure (CPM). It shows poverty rates by age, education, employment, family composition, immigrant status, and race/ethnicity. <https://www.ppic.org/interactive/whos-in-poverty-in-california/>

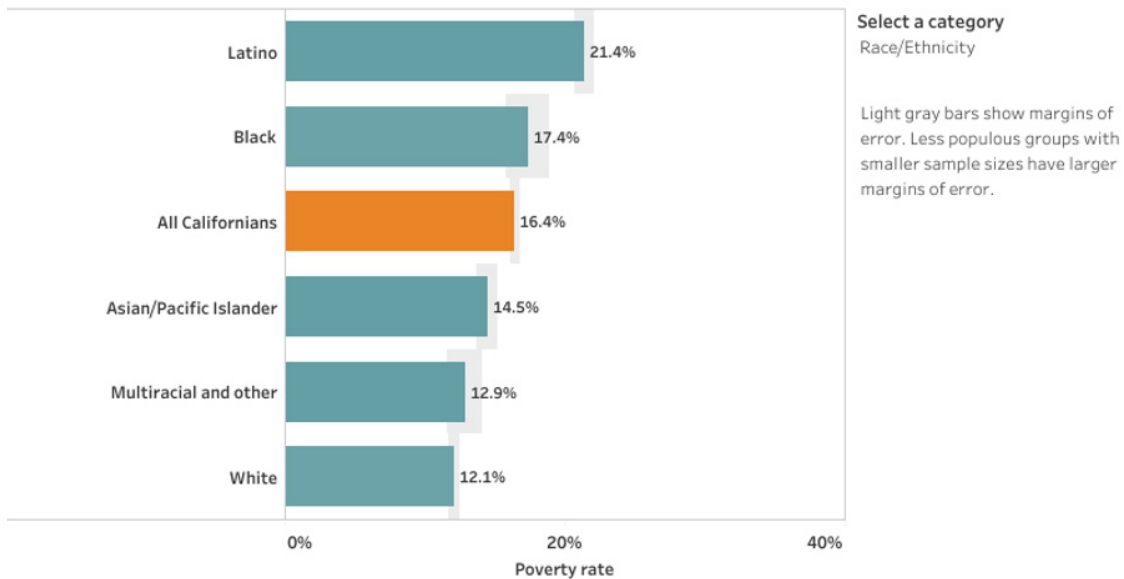
*Specific Policy Recommendations:*

- Strengthen the integration of PreK-12 and Community College adult education programs to better serve the needs of adult learners by differentiating the responsibilities of pre-collegiate and collegiate work with clearly defined accountability measures for each system; aligning outcome definitions, assessments and placement policies; and establishing processes to offer credit or certificates for prior learning and demonstrated competencies.
- Increase investments in apprenticeship programs in traditional and non-traditional occupations.
- Advance effective, integrated education and training models that allow workers to build basic skills, such as math or reading, while also being trained for specific occupations and/or industries.
- Develop a social compact and safety net for the state’s growing gig workforce, comprising minimum standards for workers and portable benefits.
- Initiate policies that mitigate the decoupling of work and workers as fast developing technologies, artificial intelligence and automation continue to disrupt the workforce.

**California 2019 Poverty Rates by Race <sup>34</sup>**

**Who’s in Poverty in California?**

Latinos have the highest poverty rates across racial/ethnic groups



Source: California Poverty Measure, 2019.

Notes: Most categories show responses about race from the American Community Survey. People of any race who report Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin are defined as Latino and categorized by their responses to that question.

From: <https://www.ppic.org/interactive/whos-in-poverty-in-california>

## Recommendation 2: Invest in regional workforce partnerships.

Workforce development strategies should be inclusive and region-specific. The Inclusive Economic Development Lab notes that, “inclusive economic development aims to ensure that the jobs created in dynamic industries are accessible to members of historically overlooked communities and that the jobs themselves are good jobs.” It goes on to note that models for equitable growth necessitate efforts to overcome barriers to employment that may be specific to a region. This could be related to a lack of specific workforce skills, or it could be due to biases that question the ability of traditionally disconnected communities to fill specific roles in a regional economy.<sup>35</sup> California must strengthen and streamline career pathways to improve talent development outcomes aligned to industry demands regionally and at the state level.

<sup>35</sup> Cooney, K. (n.d.). Changing the Regional Story for Workforce Development | Inclusive Economic Development Lab. Inclusive Economic Development Lab. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <https://iedl.yale.edu/changing-regional-story-workforce-development>

### *Specific Policy Recommendations:*

- Create a permanent program and funding stream to support cradle-through-career industry partnerships.
- Create incentive funding and accountability for workforce system stakeholders to coordinate regional engagement strategies that align with demand-side measures.
- Support investments in sector partnerships, convening employers with education, training, labor and community-based organizations to close skill gaps.
- Develop statewide business-engagement measures for workforce and education initiatives that are focused on bridging the skills gap and building a regional talent pipeline.
- Increase funding for the Strong Workforce Program.





### Recommendation 3: Develop workforce strategies for California's immigrant workforce.

California has been shaped by passionate and hard working immigrants who sought a better life by establishing themselves in the Golden State. In 2019, immigrants paid \$130.8 billion in taxes and held a spending power of \$317.6 billion.<sup>36</sup> This immigrant population is an asset and a strength, and has not historically or currently been treated as such. California has made strides in recognizing the value and dignity of this population, but needs to strengthen targeted, workforce development support for immigrant populations. Immigrants, including those without legal status, deserve educational and training supports to continue to maximize their contributions to California's economy.

<sup>36</sup> California Archives. (n.d.). New American Economy. Retrieved April 8, 2022, from <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/california/>

#### *Specific Policy Recommendations:*

- Increase investments to foster immigrant entrepreneurship and immigrant-owned businesses.
- Remove barriers to public workforce development services to maximize training and career pathways for immigrant workers, regardless of status.
- Make additional investments in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and adult basic education that emphasizes quality experiences and measurable educational and skill-based outcomes.
- Invest in programs that upskill or reskill low-wage immigrant workers and connect them to higher wage, in-demand careers.
- Increase access to financial aid to increase educational attainment for immigrants beyond a baccalaureate degree.
- Support implementation of professional licensure for undocumented immigrants.



#### Recommendation 4: Remove barriers to employment by advocating for expungement, and support for harm reduction programs and alternatives to incarceration.

As a result of America's long, painful and ineffective history of mass incarceration, between an estimated 70 and 100 million Americans have a criminal record.<sup>37</sup> In California, approximately 8 million individuals have a criminal record.<sup>38</sup> According to a study conducted by Californians for Safety and Justice, nearly half of all Californians with a criminal record have difficulty finding a job, and about 35 percent have difficulty obtaining occupational licenses.<sup>39</sup> California has an obligation to take steps to address the failed mass incarceration experiment by targeting workforce development strategies to support justice-involved individuals.

<sup>37</sup> Rebecca Vallas and Sharon Dietrich, "One Strike and You're Out: Removing Barriers to Economic Security for People with Criminal Records" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2014). Retrieved April 7, 2022 from <https://americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/reports/2014/12/02/102308/one-strike-and-youre-out/>.

<sup>38</sup> Karamagi, C., Teji, S., & Sridharan, V. (2018, May). Repairing the Road to Redemption in California. Californians for Safety and Justice. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from [https://safeandjust.org/wp-content/uploads/CSJ\\_SecondChances-ONLINE-May14.pdf](https://safeandjust.org/wp-content/uploads/CSJ_SecondChances-ONLINE-May14.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

#### Specific Policy Recommendations:

- Sunset convictions, and implement a comprehensive system to prospectively and retroactively seal conviction and arrest records.
- Enact Pretrial Reform and ensure people accused do not remain in custody simply because they cannot afford bail.
- Uphold and protect Proposition 47 and 57 reforms that reclassified certain theft and drug possession offenses from felonies to misdemeanors and changed rules for charging juveniles as adults.
- Remove barriers to reentry, reduce incarceration rates, and develop a robust community reentry system.

## Conclusion

**California's elected leaders have the power and the responsibility to uplift the future of California's children and economy.** The decisions and work of these leaders must focus on ensuring California is prepared to advance equity across all dimensions — including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, religion and social class background. Leaders must consider special populations, such as youth disconnected from school and work; foster and transition-aged youth; dislocated workers; individuals working low-wage jobs disconnected to living wage career pathways; immigrants; and individuals with justice system involvement.

Advancing equity will be most successful if a deliberate, cradle-through-career focus is applied, with policies,

programs and funding strongly coordinated and aligned in a way that improves the quality of life for all Californians, regardless of age. It must include a willingness to identify and dismantle intentional and unintentional institutional racism and inequitable institutional policies and structures. This work must ensure that parents and community members are actively engaged and empowered in these decisions and in investments on behalf of their children and communities. We need courageous leadership to find and acknowledge these inequities and make the commensurate investments and changes to fully address the present and cumulative impacts of structural racism.

Together, with strategic investments, bold leadership and actively engaged communities, the Golden State will be poised for a bright, equitable and successful future.





**UNITELA**

Education Innovation Through Collaboration

Sonia Campos-Rivera  
Senior Vice President, Education Policy and Public Affairs  
srivera@unitela.com