



Barriers to College Completion:
An Overview of Bay Area Non-Profit Solutions & Efforts

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PURPOSE OF STUDY

San Francisco Bay Area foundations have played an active funding role, historically, for many local after-school and college access programs at the primary and secondary levels of schooling. Some of these foundations¹ have expressed concern that the student alumni of their grantee organizations face a multitude of challenges at the collegiate level, leading them to drop out before completing a four-year degree program. The implications of non-completion are pertinent not only to private funders who have invested heavily in college access programs, but also to taxpayers.

The primary goal of this exploratory research is to study the complexities underlying existing efforts that track and support low-income, first-generation,² and minority college students through their tertiary education experience. The short-term goal is to raise awareness of and funding for Bay Area non-profit organizations that help resolve the impediments and barriers to college persistence, success, and completion.

The long-term goal is to build pathways and partnerships amongst organizations, replicate models, and/or scale for sustainability.

¹ *This study has been commissioned by Sand Hill Foundation and the Walter S. Johnson Foundation through the Stanford University Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society. For questions, contact the author at kbansal615@gmail.com.*

² *The National Center for Education Statistics defines first-generation college students as those undergraduates whose parents never enrolled in postsecondary education and low-income college students as those whose family income falls 125% below the federal poverty line.*

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In order to remain competitive on a global scale, the United States needs an educated workforce to achieve its economic and social goals. For instance, experts estimate that by 2018, six out of ten jobs in the country will require a college degree. Unfortunately, Department of Education statistics state that only 40 percent of American adults currently hold a college degree or diploma, ranking the United States at number 14 amongst OECD countries. Figure 1 ranks college completion rates amongst OECD countries.

"The United States has the highest college dropout rate in the industrialized world."

The OECD report also indicates that "the United States has

the highest college dropout rate in the industrialized world." Amongst four-year colleges, this rate is about 43 percent nationwide; amongst community colleges, this rate is about 69 percent. These figures, which aim to identify that mere enrollment in college is not enough of an indicator of individual or societal success, point to greater disparities amongst ethnic, income, and gender minorities.

The state of California specifically ranks 40th in the country for high school graduates going directly to college. Similarly, it ranks 30th amongst 25-34 year olds with a two-year degree and 23rd amongst 25-34 year olds with a four-year degree.

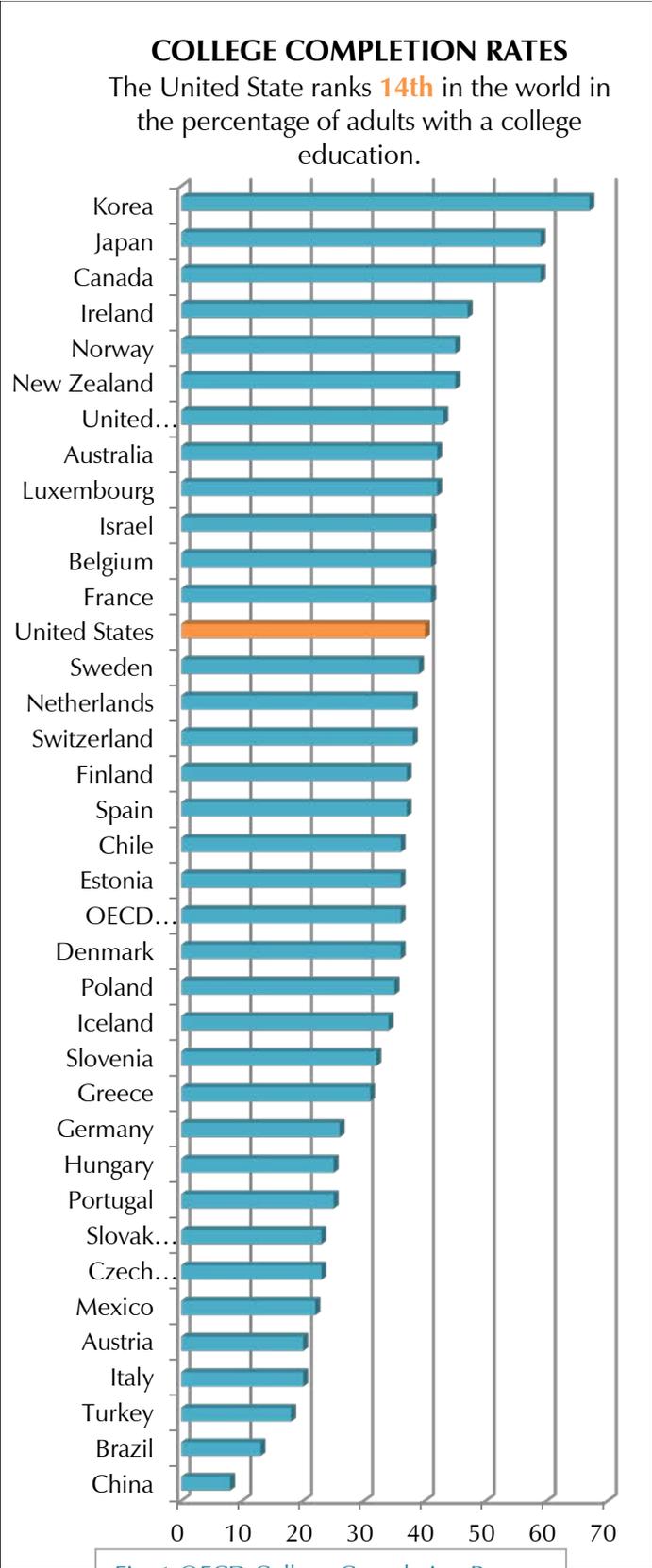


Fig. 1 OECD College Completion Rates

Figure 2: State of California ranks two- and four-year degree-attainment rankings (compared to other states)³

California is Becoming Less Educated Than Other States Rank Among States in Percent of Population with College Degrees		
Age	Associates Degree of Higher	Bachelors Degree of Higher
Older than 64	2 nd	5 th
45 to 64	11 th	10 th
35 to 44	21 st	16 th
25 to 34	30 th	23 rd

Even though the San Francisco Bay Area boasts the state's highest number of working age adults with a bachelor's degree (at about 43 percent), the figure does not and will not suffice for the high demand of skilled labor that is even more unique to this region. What hurts regional and state economic goals further is that certain individuals face disproportionate barriers to post-secondary access and success.

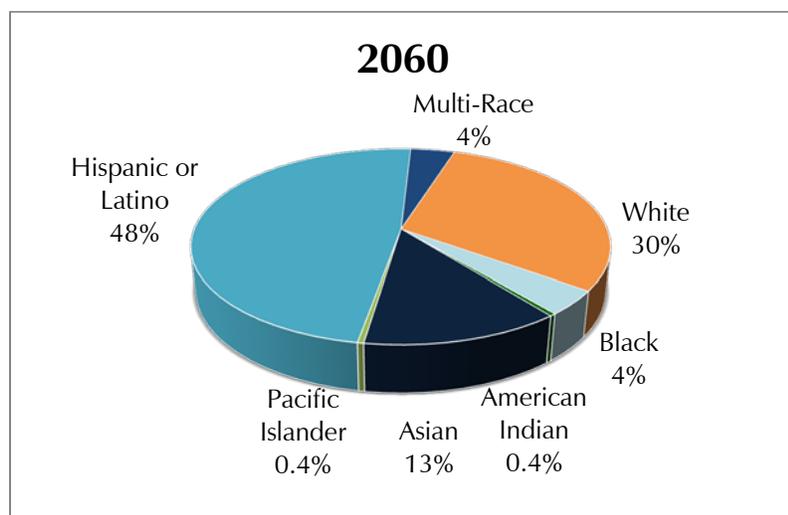
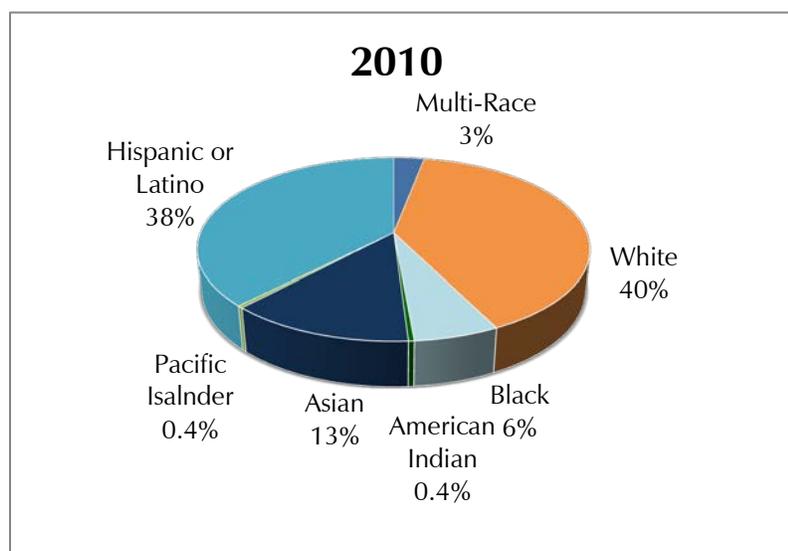
In California, and especially in the San Francisco Bay Area, a high number of young people belong to low-income, first-generation, and minority college student demographic groups.

For example, amongst the 15-24 year olds in the state, Hispanics currently represent more than 45 percent of that population. In fact, the state's total non-White and non-Asian population¹, which was already at 47 percent in 2010, is expected to rise to 57 percent in just 50 years (or by 2060). Figure 3 provides a breakdown of the present and future predicted demographic distribution in the state of California.

The unique college persistence challenges faced by this demographic have led to dismal college completion numbers amongst the state's soon to be majority-minority population.

³ Source: http://www.naleo.org/institutes/NELI_San_Jose_2012/2The%20Status%20of%20Higher%20Education%20in%20California/R_Ensuring%20that%20the%20Next%20Generation%20has%20the%20Opportunity%20to%20go%20to%20College.pdf

Figure 3: State of California demographic breakdown (present distribution and future predicted)⁴



For example, only 46 percent of Black and 53 percent of Latino enrollees in any California state four-year University finish their degree in six years. Moreover, with only about 16 percent of Hispanics in California possessing some post-secondary degree, compared to almost 51 percent of their White counterparts, current degree-attainment rates among California's adults (ages 25 to 64) do not reflect their representation as a population group. Figure 4 provides adult degree-attainment rates by race for the state of California.

Thus, despite national figures indicating rising post-secondary enrollment rates and youth desires to attend a tertiary institution (approximately 80 percent of high school students admit to the goal), many of these students never make it to college.

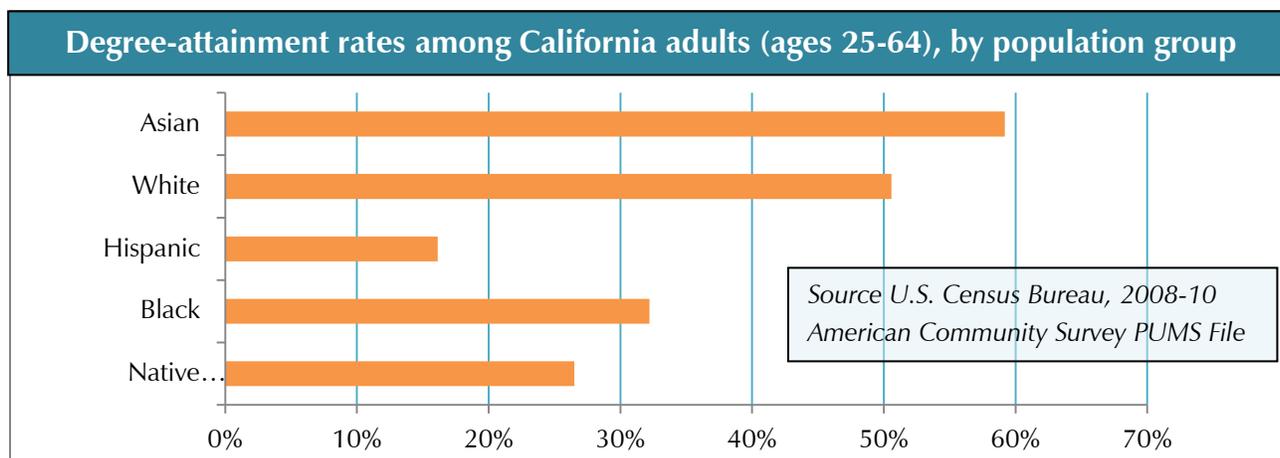
For some, the deficiency is as simple as a lack of information about their options for applying to and financing post-secondary education.

Others don't have the role models to encourage or guide them through the process of getting to and through the university lifestyle. Finally, many who do make it to a two-year or four-year degree program end up dropping out due to a lack of funding, social networks, and/or academic preparation.

Amongst those disadvantaged students who actually complete college, many face post-graduation debt and employment challenges.

⁴ Source: http://www.dof.ca.gov/research/demographic/reports/projections/P-1/documents/Projections_Press_Release_2010-2060.pdf

Figure 4: State of California adult degree-attainment rates (by race)⁵



Fortunately, California has some of the nation's lowest default rates, possibly attributable to its large immigrant population (historically found to be more loan averse than White or African American counterparts). Still, and especially after the 2008 recession, many students fear labor market slumps, which often coincide with university scholarship cuts and high interest rate loans.

Since research shows that a Hispanic college graduate with a four-year degree can earn anywhere from \$1.174M to \$1.686M more over the course of a 40-year working career, compared to Hispanics with only a high school diploma, these fears and financial barriers need resolution in order to ensure "intergenerational economic progress" (Ezekiel, Johnson, Mejia and Zeiger 2013). Otherwise, the State risks falling into the trap of the very structural racism problems that social justice and education reform leaders in California have been fighting against.

Just as focus has shifted in the past from primary and secondary *education for all* to *college access* initiatives, these efforts have paved the way now for *college persistence* programs to gain attention. More leaders in every sector and level of education are recognizing that a low college completion rate means a weaker tax base, more public services, and less safety. To them, college completion translates into civic responsibility, with citizens who are "more likely to vote, volunteer, exercise, and prepare their own children to succeed in school" (Schramm and Zalesne 2009).

In fact, "for every dollar California spends on its public colleges, it receives more than four dollars in additional tax revenue generated by college graduates" (Ezekiel, Johnson, Mejia and Zeiger 2013).

⁵ Source: http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/A_Stronger_Nation-2012.pdf

Similarly, "for every 10 percent increase in the fraction of a city's population that has a four-year degree, regional wages at every educational level rise by 8 percent" (Schramm and Zalesne 2009). Moreover, since a college degree brings with it approximately 75 percent greater individual lifetime earnings, the implications of not diverting current impediments to success can hamper not only national and state-level economic goals, but also an individual's ability to break out of the poverty lifecycle. Figure 5 estimates lifetime earning premiums based on education levels by race and ethnicity.

Many students fear labor market slumps, which often coincide with university scholarship cuts and high interest rate loans.

Figure 5: Estimates of lifetime earning premiums based on education levels (by race and ethnicity)⁶

College Education – The Million Dollar Pay Off				
<i>Income Relative to Non-Hispanic White with High School Diploma, 2010</i>				
	Less than High School	High School	College, No BA	BA or more
Native Born				
Non-Hispanic White	\$416,000	\$0	\$431,000	\$1,921,000
Non-Hispanic Black	\$749,000	\$322,000	\$73,000	\$1,169,000
Asian/Pacific Islander	\$491,000	\$230,000	\$259,000	\$1,525,000
Hispanic/Latino	\$508,000	\$186,000	\$176,000	\$1,178,000
Foreign Born				
Non-Hispanic White	\$594,000	\$195,000	\$458,000	\$1,754,000
Asian/Pacific Islander	\$626,000	\$437,000	\$194,000	\$731,000
Hispanic/Latino	\$572,000	\$257,000	\$31,000	\$602,000

⁶ Source: <http://www.collegecampaign.org/resource-library/our-publications/ca-economic-payoff/>

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This report was guided by a three-pronged methodology. I began my research by conducting a literature review of college completion impediments for low-income, first-generation, and minority youth and why these matter to both the nation and the state of California. Simultaneously, I identified Bay Area non-profits and foundations that focus on college completion efforts targeted towards low-income, first-generation, and minority youth. The appended Annotated Organization List includes a summary of both national and Bay Area specific organizations, clustered first by the *Type of Organization* (i.e., “College Completion Only” versus “College Access Only”)⁷ and then by *Funding Priority*, which I determined based on the organization’s alignment with my recommendations and its presence in the Bay Area. Finally, using three different protocols, I interviewed 23 regional policymakers, school and college leaders, and grant makers working in this space in an effort to summarize best practices and identify where funding gaps and opportunities for investment lie. Appendix Table 1 includes a list of these interviewees (in alphabetical order) and appendix Table 2 includes the interview protocols I utilized.

One key limitation is the way in which I reached my interview candidates – through the use of a snowball sample. More specifically, my initial contacts referred me to other individuals who in turn connected me to more potential interviewees. To counter this potential conflict, I ensured that my interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions that would allow interviewees to speak freely and solicit candid answers. In this way, I was

able to conduct my non-randomized analysis by at least avoiding forced or one directional answers. Moreover, when I was faced with consistent responses regardless of participants’ varying experiences, I broadened the scope of my literature review in order to verify the possible source of this consistency. Thus, when literature pointed to similar issues, an overlap amongst interviewee concerns actually indicated to me an existence of a serious problem, rather than a limitation of my methodology.

Finally, I made some specific assumptions and scope decisions in my methodology. In order to launch this study, I assumed that the problem of post-secondary completion does exist in the San Francisco Bay Area; the organizations and literature pertaining to it have sufficient insight into resolving it; and that low-income, first generation, and minority college students are the primary demographic of concern. This lens, rather than veil the complexity or scale of the problem, was simply a measure of exploration and initiation into this area of philanthropy. Thus, it is important to note that literature exists and experts work in this field both nationally and internationally, and in fact, I often times deferred to their knowledge in order to learn best practices pertinent to my concern.⁸

⁷ A “Hybrid Model” indicates that organization serves both college access and completion purposes

⁸ In regards to terminology, “college completion”, “college persistence”, and “college success” are often used interchangeably throughout this report.

FINDINGS: FOUR PRIMARY BARRIERS TO COLLEGE COMPLETION

The literature review and interview analysis reveal four primary barriers that impede college success for low-income, first-generation, and minority college students. They include:

1. **Incomplete Access to Information about College Affordability and Resources**
2. **Inadequate College and Career Guidance**
3. **Misalignment and Remediation Throughout the P-16 System**
4. **Missing Family or Peer Support and Professional Networks**

It is important to note that while these four impediments overlap significantly with each other, as well as with college access and post-tertiary barriers, they are, without aiming to be exhaustive, meant to guide the investment recommendations and the analysis of model organizations outlined in the next section.

Incomplete Access to Information about College Affordability and Resources

Because often their family members simply did not attend college, many of these students have lacked the social capital in their homes to create a college-going culture. Their families don't know how to save for their post-secondary studies and the students cannot always take full advantage of the government and private resources available to them. One of the most practical implications of this barrier is that these kids do not grow up thinking that they want to, or that they even can, attend college.

For those who do wish to attend college, they often have incomplete information about what college they should apply to or what procedures to follow to help them pay for school. Without this guidance, many of these kids resort to attending broad access colleges⁹, where student services are not as robust. Research and interventions attempt to re-route these students to more elite universities, but interviews reveal frustration over organizations that focus their recruitment efforts on students who are already college bound. According to some interviewees, historic efforts by government and non-government leaders only target high-achieving, disadvantaged students for attendance at elite colleges, which already boast highly-funded completion efforts.

Instead, many interviewees think that the solution to the current problem lies in increasing early financial literacy efforts for low-achieving students and encouraging kids to apply to the right college for them, regardless of financial capability. Interviewees believe that interventions can then focus on making sure that these non-elite college students maximize the resources available to them to help pay for school, learn how best to spend the grant and scholarship money they do receive, take out the least interest-burdened loans, and pay back their debt in a timely manner.

⁹ *“Broad access colleges” are defined as State universities with bachelor’s and master’s degree programs but not necessarily doctoral programs. They are funded primarily by government aid and student tuitions rather than private donations. In California, the California State Universities fall in this category and cater significantly to this study’s target demographic. Note that the University of California campuses are not included in this definition.*

Many existing organizations work in the Bay Area to help students plan and maintain these college savings and application processes before and during college, including uAspire, Scholar Match, CFED, and Opportunity Fund. New York City-based organization SingleStop indirectly serves this cause by helping community college students maximize their government-provided services, including debt load management.

Inadequate College and Career Guidance

Because schools are often responsible to help fill the gap families cannot in terms of kids' college and career readiness, high school and college counselors are burdened with the bulk of work meant to help students get into and through college. Unfortunately, course planning and long-term career preparation are not always part of counselors' job descriptions, and this task adds to their already overburdened workloads. Moreover, disadvantaged youth often attend high-need schools and colleges, where counselors' caseloads do not allow for adequate one-on-one time for each student.

Interviews suggest that poor counselor allocations are a result of ubiquitous community perceptions that the majority of the kids they serve are simply not cut out to go to or complete college (one interviewee especially emphasized this observation as it applies to foster youth). As another interviewee pointed out, the issue should be reevaluated not from a lens of student ability but rather from the viewpoint that antiquated classroom content and school pedagogy do not prepare kids for the modern economy and career trajectory. According to this interviewee, because of the current transition to Common Core focused on aligning K-12 curriculum and pedagogy to current economic trends, now is

an important time to focus attention on alignment between secondary, post-secondary curriculums and career pathways – and to advocate for funding allocations that improve student/counselor ratios.

The College Access Foundation is already making investments to increase counselor presence in California's underserved schools and colleges. The Eastside College Preparatory School is also hoping that this form of dialogue can have the added benefit of revealing to students the purpose for post-secondary education, which might encourage them persevere in high school and do better in college.

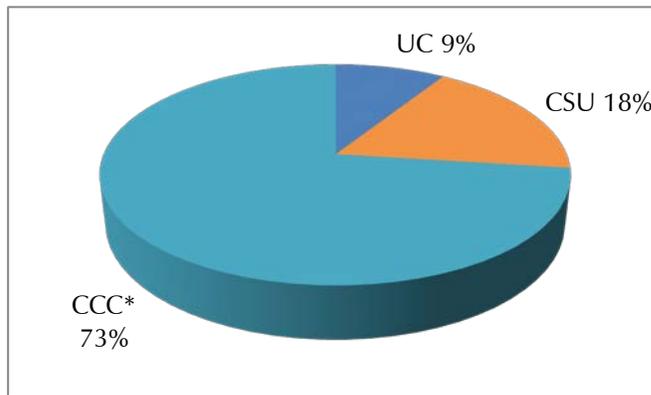
Misalignment and Remediation Throughout the P-16 System

In addition to incomplete college application, financial aid, and career guidance, many students face significant academic barriers that impede them from college completion success. For instance, a common concern amongst interviewees deals with students enrolling in developmental education classes. Research reveals that students enrolled in these courses have a hard time completing remediation requirements and moving on to classes that grant them credit hours that can be used towards graduation. One interviewee attributed this problem to the A through G system and the hindrance of its quality to help students in both meeting proficiency standards in high school or passing the poorly-designed math and English language placement exams that determine student academic levels when entering college.

In addition, much of the literature and many of the interviewees point out that a majority of remediation takes place at the community college level. For instance, 60 percent of California's community college students and 30 percent of the state's broad-access college students are enrolled in remediation coursework (the demographic make-up of these struggling students is the target of this study). The community college system, while aware of this issue, has historically faced significant difficulties working with K-12 systems to reduce the remediation rate. One issue is that high schools remain in the dark about what exactly it is that their students are struggling with most when they reach college level coursework. Yet another issue deals with California's community colleges, many of which are plagued with their own internal management problems that directly hurt the student body. For example, literature criticizes the disconnect between student enrollment numbers in these open-enrollment community colleges and classroom capacities that do not allocate enough spaces for all students to register for the classes they need.

At the same time, interviewees state that even if remedial students gained priority registration, a lack of course planning and career guidance make it difficult for them to obtain a vocational certificate, graduate with an associate degree, or transfer to a four-year institution. In fact, less than 25 percent of community college students 17-20 years of age transfer or finish community college and approximately 50 percent of broad-access college students finish after 9 years (Kirst 2008). Thus, many of these students either drop out or rack up exorbitant amounts of debt in their academic career.

Figure 6: 2006-2007 Enrollment in Higher Education in California¹¹



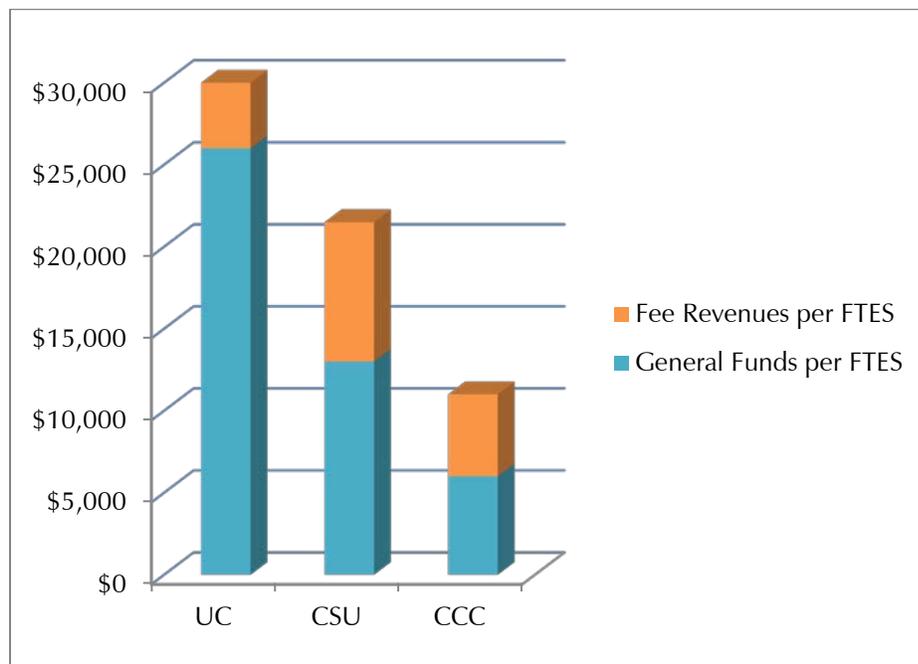
*ccc: California Community College

Unfortunately, while California's community colleges' high enrollment and failure rates warrant maximum attention, they often receive the least amount of funding and reform efforts. Figures 6 and 7 show enrollment in and funding for higher education in California for the 2006-2007 academic year.

Advocates of the Common Core or Bay Area councils focused on P-16 alignment are aware of this gap and investment opportunity. Many of them have begun to devote their resources to conducting dialogue, analyzing data, and coordinating solutions between school district, city, community college, and college-level leaders. Emerging efforts include California Community Colleges' Success Network, National League of Cities, Communities Learning in Partnership, Department of Children, Youth, and their Families, College Summit, and National Student Clearinghouse.

¹¹ & ¹² Source: http://www.csus.edu/ihelp/PDFs/R_Beyond_Open_Door_09-07.pdf

Figure 7: 2006-2007 Funding for Higher Education in California¹²



Missing Family or Peer Support and Professional Networks

For any participant of the two- or four-year college system, a post-secondary lifestyle brings with it additional barriers beyond admissions and academics. Family or peer support to help students navigate campus resources and social settings is a vital component of post-secondary success. Moreover, connections to networks that reveal career opportunities can give students a leg up in their post-graduation life goals. For many students, this individual support often comes from families and friends, which is unfortunately not always the case for low-income, first-generation, and minority college students. In fact, many individuals in this latter group face additional challenges – namely, non-traditional students or adult learners, who often have their own families to provide for,

and foster youth or students whose parents have been deported, who are usually missing this family structure altogether. For these students, there is a higher risk of dropping out of college because their special circumstances make it harder for them to stay in their programs continuously or enroll at full-time status, two means proven to lead to higher rates of post-secondary completion.

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Catering to these students' specific needs can prove to be a time-consuming and expensive challenge for school leaders and college success organizations. However, with today's student diversity defined by delayed enrollment, part-time students, online coursework, and about 50 percent of students attending more than one college in their academic career, escaping this investment is impossible. Organizations succeeding in this effort have thus found various measures that help minimize the cost burden and maximize the student benefits. For example, some college success organizations offer academic transition/preparation courses during the

summer after students' senior year in high school; others provide summer housing for foster youth; and yet another group provides wrap-around services to help students who have child-care responsibilities. In order to improve scalability, organizations like Students Rising Above have tapped into their volunteer and alumni networks and created peer/cohort models of support at partnering college campuses. Additionally, college campuses feature their own student support services, often through federal-funded educational opportunity programs such as Upward Bound and TRIO.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the findings reveal, there are many overlapping and complex problems that prevent low-income, first-generation, and minority college students from finishing their post-secondary education requirements. Successful nonprofit organizations in major US cities (e.g., San Francisco, Boston, and New York) are conducting research, funding innovative products, and sharing best practices

to turn these problems into solutions. Their models, which thus far appear to be successful in changing the outcomes of the students targeted in this study (based on internal evaluations of graduation statistics), are given as examples for the following five recommendations that are outlined for potential investment in the college access and completion space:

AREAS OF POTENTIAL INVESTMENT

1.	Increasing Financial Literacy
2.	Improving Student Access to Counselor Guidance
3.	Advocating for Policy Change
4.	Coordinating Education Reform Efforts
5.	Enhancing Social Mentorship & Customized Support Services

Increasing Financial Literacy

Many low-income, first-generation, and minority students aspire to go to college but don't have the family financial means nor the financial literacy necessary to take full advantage of the public and private funding available to them to help pay for post-secondary education. Most interviewees cited the lack of financial literacy amongst students and parents as one of the primary barriers to college success. Due to this barrier, some take on jobs during high school whereas others take out high-interest loans that enable them to attend college. In order to ensure that students focus on their academics while in high school and receive a portfolio of eligible scholarships, grants, and low-interest loans, foundations should make it a top priority to fund efforts targeted at increasing financial literacy aimed at students and parents as early as possible and maintaining that education

while students persist through their post-secondary studies.

The first way of increasing financial literacy is to help parents understand the many resources available to pay for college, thereby reducing the actual sticker price. Particularly strong parent engagement models are found at the Foundation for College Education, Parent Institute for Quality Education, and Glow Foundation. Research also finds that savings allocated for college are shown to encourage students to aspire to post-secondary education, which leads them to do better academically, both in high school and afterwards.

This is why organizations like EARN SF, Opportunity Fund, and the Kindergarten to College Program have made it a point to urge parents to get involved in their children's futures as early as possible and to link them to college savings opportunities (including those through CFED, Scholar Match, GEAR UP,

Youth Saving's Accounts, CDA's and the ASPIRE Act, 401Kids, Baby Bonds, Plus Accounts, tax-advantaged 529 college-savings plans, and Fidelity's Saving for College

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website). Three additional organizations and initiatives stand out in this space, including: the Educators for Fair Consideration, due to its work with undocumented

immigrant families; California College Pathways, due to its work with foster youth; and Scholar Match, due to its unique crowd-sourcing model of matching scholarship funds.

The second form of financial literacy dictates that students need an "understanding of debt consequences, researching financial aid and funding options, and saving and controlling costs while in school" (Fidelity 2013). Unfortunately, proper information and guidance on how to budget and spend "income" is often lacking for these students. When this funding takes the form of loans, navigating which option to choose and how to repay the debt is even more difficult for this demographic. Funding those programs that educate students on applying for public and private monies, budgeting their scholarship funds, and repaying their college debt are key to ensuring that the cycle of poverty is broken in each subsequent generation. Bay Area organizations that guide students with scholarship applications include Meritus Fund, First Graduate, Peninsula College Fund, 10,000 degrees, East Bay College Fund, Hispanic Scholarship Fund, Partnership for

College Completion, and SF Promise. Juma Ventures, College Set, and Foundation for a College Education assist students in managing their money while they persist through college. Finally, uAspire, which guides students as early as middle school all the way through college about the expense and payment process, provides valuable loan acquisition and repayment guidance to both students and their parents. Its featured work with Harvard researchers Benjamin Castleman (Graduate School of Education) and Lindsay Page (Center for Education Policy Research) make it an especially interesting organization to consider for investment, albeit new to the Bay Area region.

Improving Student Access to Counselor Guidance

Most low-income, first-generation, and minority students attend poorly-performing high schools where counselor caseloads are often overburdened to meet all the various needs of two-year, four-year, vocational, community college, and research type institutions that define the modern post-secondary landscape. Many of these students also attend either a California community college or a broad access university, both of which are plagued with the same inadequacies in terms of student-counselor interactions as their high schools. Since counselors are a vital resource to high school and college students, non-profit organizations are striving to diversify the avenues through which they provide this service, which includes high school and college course planning, enrollment in remediation and completion of required credits, and career guidance and professional development. Foundations can thus support their ventures by funding innovative technological solutions and counselor intervention efforts.

A major responsibility that high school and college students bear is the completion and timely submission of the plethora of post-secondary applications that deal with admissions, housing, financial aid, and graduation. Since high school and college counselors do not always have the capacity to support each student through the multiple iterations of this process, some organizations are developing automated tools to lighten counselor caseloads and ensure student needs are serviced. Beyond 12's social networking tools and applications allow students to pose questions and receive responses in an open

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forum for collaboration on college access and persistence issues. GradGuru's reminder service goes beyond the student interaction level and even targets high schools, college access organizations, and community college counselors.

A more personalized, and in turn less automated, service that counselors can provide is course and career planning. Interviews reveal an urgency around this issue, with some interviewees insisting that students should be required to work with counselors in high school to lay out a college application and course selection plan that will align with their skill levels and career goals. Unfortunately, many students in this study's target demographic fail to receive this kind of attention, leading them to enroll in courses they are over or under-qualified for, miss registration for the courses they actually need, fail to meet the requirements for timely transfer from a two- to a four-year degree program, or worse yet, remain in a limbo in which they do not receive either an associate's

certificate or a bachelor's degree, both of which are vital to their career progression.

Organizations tackle these deficiencies by working with students and counselors at the high school, community college, and four-year institution level to encourage two-year certification pathways alongside four-year career options, to ensure priority registration for remedial students, and to help guide students towards full-time enrollment and credit load maximization during the first years of schooling. Genesys Works, which has recently entered the Bay Area from Houston, TX, especially stands out. Its 14-month intervention, in which rising seniors spend 2 months in the summer training on hard and soft skills and 12 months during their senior year working in a paid internship position at a Fortune 500 company, helps to develop high schoolers' professional skills and paints the bigger picture of college access and success for these students. Summer Search and 100% College Prep also have a prominent presence at the high school level, and Inside Track, Metro Academies, SAGE, and the Career Ladders Project are represented at the two-year college and four-year university levels.

Advocating for Policy Change

Even though individual organizations play a vital role in identifying barriers to college success and addressing those issues they find most pressing, certain impediments cannot be overcome without policy change. According to ACHIEVE, a national college and career readiness advocacy group, these include alignment of high school graduation requirements with college- and career- ready expectations, development of P-20¹³ longitudinal data systems, and development of

¹³ A P-20 system integrates a student's education beginning in preschool (as early as 3 years old) through graduate school.

accountability and reporting systems that promote college and career readiness. Interview analysis also reveals a need to be critical of financial aid requirements, which one interviewee cited as the root cause of student drop-out rates. The National League of Cities is working with school districts, city governments, and two- and four-year colleges around the country to utilize National Student Clearinghouse Data to help fix school academics and provide leaders and faculty at all levels with research and data to help improve individual student outcomes. In California, tests such as the EAP¹⁴ and legislation such as SB1440/440¹⁵ already exist as starting points to address policy problems. Such initial efforts in advocacy can benefit tremendously from foundation support allocated towards expediting the policy change cause.

An ongoing effort aimed at alignment is San Francisco's Bridge to Success initiative, which coordinates dialogue between the school district, community college, and mayor's office to revisit the A-G high school curriculum and its ability to prepare students for remedial placement tests and college-level coursework. Since only about 8.5 percent of community college students enrolled in remedial coursework actually finish a credential within four years -- with a bigger gap for low-income, first-generation, and minority students -- this exercise in remodeling the system has potential to bring changes to even development education placement tests, while reducing the rate of enrollment in and increasing the successes in remedial

¹⁴ *Collaboration between State Board of Education (SBE), California Department of Education (CDE), and California State University (CSU) to assess high school juniors' Math and English readiness for college; goal is to address academic gaps during senior year in high school.*

coursework. In fact, since development education hurts student success in college, this coordination can also be geared towards

While data and its analysis is enough to identify gaps in the education system, the role of government is vital in enforcing schools to change, incentivizing students to cooperate, encouraging faculty and staff to participate, and disseminating information to the general public.

increasing counseling that encourages students to take dual enrollment classes in local community colleges while they are in high school. The Silicon Valley

Education Foundation and the San Francisco School Alliance's Pathways to Prosperity program also conduct research that is used to influence policy on high school graduation requirements, including A-G readiness standards. The Campaign for College Opportunity, focused entirely on higher education in California, engages leaders and educates the public on such policy research while simultaneously publishing reports that assess policy implementation. Some of their success stories include work towards increasing state budget allocations for post-secondary education (SB1456 in 2012) or providing alternate pathways, such as online classes, for speedy degree completion¹².

Another focus in the Bay Area is on data-driven software analysis that holds school districts and policy makers accountable while empowering students, faculty and teachers, and the public with information. While data

¹⁵ *For a full list of current policy priorities, visit <http://www.collegecampaign.org/policy-priorities/>.*

and its analysis is enough to identify gaps in the education system, the role of government is vital in enforcing schools to change, incentivizing students to cooperate, encouraging faculty and staff to participate, and disseminating information to the general public. Non-profits like the Education Trust West help secondary and post-secondary institutions track student outcomes, identify areas for improvement, and push through best practice programs that turn problem points around. Another advocacy organization that has experienced tremendous success in this space is the Bay Area Council. The Bay Area Council is a membership organization made up of business leaders who focus on public policy reform geared towards improving the local economy and standard of living. Its efforts have helped launch dialogue about community college course completion and transfer outcomes, enabled the passage of SB 1357 in 2010 to use data that tracks struggling students earlier in their K-12 education career, and more recently initiated the development of legislation targeted towards workforce readiness training in high school and community college populations.

Coordinating Education Reform Efforts

Coordination between government, non-profit, and philanthropic organizations can help lead the way to improving the nation's post-secondary success statistics. In addition to this long-term systematic change, near-term best practices can be exchanged between those aiming to reach the same goals. Achieving synergies between organizations performing the same task can help streamline certain overlapping services so that students receive them more efficiently. For example, university teachers can exchange-teach at community colleges or community college professors can

exchange-teach at high schools so that both students and their current teachers are exposed to what is expected of them upon graduation. Amongst organizations reliant on outside funding, the challenge with this recommendation lies in both scarce public funds and competition to obtain philanthropic dollars. Philanthropic organizations can play a key role in reducing competition by encouraging funding for those non-profit organizations that demonstrate coordination of efforts at college campuses and high schools where they have a shared presence.

Local charter and private schools are good examples of innovative coordination efforts. For example, KIPP middle schools in the Bay Area partner with Accenture to educate their students on career readiness skills and with Citi Bank to teach them and their families about college finances. Similarly, the Eastside College Preparatory School has partnered with Beyond 12 to track its alumni and support students in college after high school graduation. These partnerships with local businesses and college persistence organizations allow the schools to keep their in-house focus on college access and outsourcing college persistence services to

Philanthropic organizations can play a key role in reducing competition by encouraging funding for those non-profit organizations that demonstrate coordination of efforts.

those best suited to handle them. College Spring also partners with local schools and non-

profits to provide SAT prep services. Additionally, the New Schools Venture Fund's College Achievement Network works with charter schools all over the country to share

best practices on their shared goal to prepare students for college success. Foundations can help replicate such programs in traditional public schools.

Enhancing Social Mentorship and Customized Support Services

In addition to scaling best practices targeted towards financial literacy, counselor guidance, policy advocacy, and organizational coordination, philanthropic money can also enhance social mentorship and customized support services necessary for students' post-secondary success. These services, targeted towards certain populations, are often difficult to identify and scale. In the Bay Area, however, organizations have begun to address these needs through summer transition programs, wrap-around services for foster youth, and one-on-one mentorship. With appropriately catered funding, efforts such as these can lead to significant improvements in college graduation statistics amongst low income, first generation, and minority college students.

Despite being accepted into and enrolled in college many students in this study's target demographic tend to melt-away during the summer before they begin their freshman year in college. Whereas, for some, the reason for this is a lack of funding for college, for many others it is inadequate preparedness for college-level academics and lifestyles. On-campus bridge programs and pre-freshman year summer transition programs can thus help students academically, as well as kick-start their social networks before even arriving on the college campus. The Athletic Scholars Advancement Program provides scholarships to high school students and recent high school graduates so that they may attend such summer bridge or transition programs at universities all across the country. For those students who still fail to make it to college,

programs like Year Up provide these students the opportunity to work, earn college credit, and save money while they decide on their future goals.

Wrap-around services, including time and money-saving/making options, are key to ensuring these non-traditional students attend and complete their coursework.

Among those students who make it to college, many have families to support alongside their

collegiate responsibilities. Wrap-around services, including time and money-saving/making options, are key to ensuring these non-traditional students attend and complete their coursework. Students Rising Above stands out as an organization active in this space. It provides service and emotional support for students and their families, including tuition and financial aid, student advisors, medical and dental care, paid summer internship guidance, pre-college readiness support programs, and off-to-college seminars.

On the opposite end of the family service spectrum are foster youth. These students have spent most of their life moving from one home to another, leading them to have more issues growing up and thus needing more collegiate support than any of their peers. Unfortunately, this population is often overlooked when it comes to college access programs and usually not expected to persist through post-secondary education. The California College Pathways and Independent Living Skills Program are two efforts attempting to reverse these expectations and trends by providing summer housing, a financial fallback,

and emotional support to these youth as they transition into and strive to succeed in college.

Along the lines of emotional support comes basic college training that low income, first-generation, and minority students do not get from their parents who didn't attend post-secondary institutions. These tools include guidance on study skills, dorm living, leadership opportunities, career networks, and utilization of campus resources, including professor and TA office hours. Because one-on-one mentorship of this kind is difficult to scale and replicate across universities, local organizations request volunteer hours from alumni of their programs and within their service universities as a means to reach the maximum number of students with the most accurate information. The College Dream Team, for example, utilizes its alumni to work with high school students to educate and prepare them for college applications and acceptance. Other groups have also taken advantage of peer or cohort models, in which students meet and support each other on their university campuses, through coordination efforts led by organizations like Alive and Free.

CONCLUSION

Based on the number of national and local college persistence organizations operating here (as compared to most other states), California is ahead of the nation in addressing the higher education persistence problems faced by its low-income, first-generation, and minority college students. However, the non-profit college completion field is fractured and relatively young. Due to its knowledge-based economy, the Bay Area has a lot to gain from dealing with this issue as quickly as possible. Literature review, interview analysis, and organizational research reveal four major barriers to success in this community. Specifically, foundations and policymakers should pay attention to resolving issues dealing with Incomplete Information Channels about Admissions Resources, Negative Community Perceptions about Student Ability, Poor Academic Planning in the K-12 and Community College Systems, and a Lack of Social Networks and Moral Support.

Fortunately, amongst the 94 organizations assessed in this study, 55 have a college completion focus and 49 of those have a presence in the Bay Area. The Bay Area organizations as a whole address all four impediments to completion. Based on the recommendations, 34 *Increase Financial Literacy*, 22 *Improve Student-Counselor Interactions*, 10 *Advocate for Systematic Policy Change*, 13 *Encourage Coordination Amongst Organizations*, and 22 *Enhance Social Mentorship and Customized Support Services*¹⁶. Non-profit organizations that stand out as catering to at least three out of five of these focus areas are listed to the right.

BAY AREA ORGANIZATIONS TACKLING 3+ RECOMMENDED AREAS OF INVESTMENT	
Beyond 12	With presence in San Francisco and Atlanta
College Track	Serving approximately 1,200 high school and college students in 2011-12
East Bay Leadership Foundation	With presence in Oakland, Richmond, Pittsburg, and San Jose
Educators for Fair Consideration	Offering scholarships and social network to 20+ undocumented Bay Area students each year
Foundation for a College Education	140 students served to date
California College Pathways	With presence in 30+ California college campuses
Hispanic Scholarship Fund	Over \$360M in scholarships awarded since 1975
iMentor	Recently entered the college persistence space with a very small presence in the Bay Area; interview analysis reveals promising outlook
KIPP	Projected outcome: 10,000 former KIPP students to be enrolled in college by 2015
Metro Academies	Based in San Francisco
Partnership for College Completion	\$7.5M targeted to serve 6,000+ students in 2012
Peninsula College Fund	Boasts a 95% on-track college completion rate
Students Rising Above	100% first-generation, 75% below the poverty line, 72% without a parent, 40% homeless, 35% abandoned, 25% raise siblings, and 20% disabled
Summer Search	With presence in San Francisco, Silicon Valley, and North San Francisco Bay

This analysis points to two areas of investment that still lag behind in terms of the attention they receive in the college persistence space in the San Francisco Bay Area. *Advocating for Systematic Policy Change* and *Encouraging Coordination Amongst Organizations* are essential but still overlooked by many efforts targeted towards low-income, first-generation, and minority college completion measures. Investments in these spaces must not divert

Future quantitative research could, as a result, evaluate the success of existing financial aid models

organizations, especially for those organizations who are either adding a college completion component to their existing model or for others who are partnering with successful college completion organizations.

existing funding away from data analysis, technological services, and college access

However, investments could broaden the scope of research towards developing an ecosystem of college success, in which metrics are shared by leading organizations to evaluate the success of existing and proposed areas of investment. Future quantitative research could, as a result, evaluate the success of existing financial aid models, especially those that match investment funds or policies designed around income-based loan repayment plans. Further, future qualitative research could assess community colleges, as well as the experiences of undocumented students and adult learners in their efforts towards post-secondary education success. Studying student experiences (including those dealing with systematic racism) and the longitudinal data on their progress (including at the high school level) will help determine the results of public and private investments and guide the fine-tuning efforts of government and nonprofit organizations seeking to ensure the lifetime benefits of college completion for students of all achievement levels¹³.

¹³ I began some of this analysis, but in order to limit the scope of this research, I included Tables 3 and 4 as a launching point for further study. Table 3 can additionally include school system leaders, and Table 4 can expand to include national foundations.

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