

DIVIDED WE FAIL:

Improving Completion and Closing Racial Gaps in California's Community Colleges

Key Findings

Divided We Fail is a report that tracks more than a quarter of a million students (255,253) who entered a California Community College in 2003-04 over six years and analyzes their progress and outcomes by major racial/ethnic populations. The study highlights the urgent need to improve student outcomes in our community colleges, particularly for blacks and Latinos.

- **TOO MANY STUDENTS FAIL TO COMPLETE.** Six years after enrolling, 70% of degree-seeking students had not completed a certificate or degree, and had not transferred to a university (about 75% of black students and 80% of Latinos). Most had dropped out; only 15% of the non-completers were still enrolled.
- **TRANSFER SUCCESS IS LOW.** About 23% of degree seekers transferred to a university, and Latino students were only half as likely as white students to transfer (14% vs 29%).
- **FOR-PROFIT SECTOR'S ROLE IS GROWING.** An increasing share of transfer students is enrolling in the for-profit sector. Black students are especially likely to transfer to for-profit institutions, and to leave the CCC system with fewer credits completed.
- **COMPLETION RATES AND LEVELS OF DISPARITY VARY.** The widely varying rates of completion and levels of disparity across colleges of similar size and similar shares of under-represented minority students suggest that some colleges find ways to be more effective at helping students of all backgrounds make progress. Disparity levels vary between 2% and 26%.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **COLLECT DATA AND ACT UPON IT.** The Chancellor’s Office should coordinate a systemwide, and systematic, effort by which cohort data for student progress through milestones and key enrollment patterns are analyzed for every college.
- **CREATE A PUBLIC AGENDA FOR HIGHER EDUCATION.** A policy framework is needed that sets goals across all three segments for college participation and degree completion, identifies the policies and investments needed to accomplish those goals, and monitors progress toward achieving the goals (including goals and progress related to closing achievement gaps).
- **DEVELOP A FUNDING MODEL FOR STUDENT SUCCESS.** A new funding model should be adopted that rewards colleges for helping student progress through milestones, including completing college-level English and math, and for helping under-prepared students meet key milestones.
- **ASSESS AND SUPPORT STUDENTS TO SUCCEED.** The Board of Governors should take steps to ensure that all degree-seeking students are assessed for college readiness and are directed appropriately into courses that will expedite their transition to and success in college-level instruction.
- **INCREASE TRANSFERS, ASSOCIATE DEGREES, AND CERTIFICATES.** The Legislature should take steps to guard against erosion of the historic transfer function of community colleges by enacting policies that encourage students to earn associate degrees prior to transfer, that ensure sufficient capacity at UC and CSU for transfer students, and that better enable students to complete terminal associate degree and certificate programs.