

**Meeting 18 Summary**  
**Looking Forward: Preparing Our Students for a New Workforce**

March 26–27, 2012  
Menlo Park, California

Prepared by Joel Knudson, American Institutes for Research

---

***Note:** This meeting summary was developed as a resource for members of the California Collaborative on District Reform. We are making this document publicly available in an effort to share the work of the Collaborative more broadly to inform dialogue and decisions of educators throughout the state. However, it does not contain the background and contextual information that might otherwise accompany a product created for the purpose of public consumption.*

Meeting 18 of the California Collaborative on District Reform extended the topic of our November 2011 meeting in Long Beach, in which we began to explore the meaning of the “career” piece of college and career readiness for K–12 education systems. Breaking from our typical approach of grounding the discussion in the context of a particular district, the two-day convening took a more global view of the opportunities that exist for students after they complete their K–12 education. Meeting dialogue explored current and anticipated demand for labor—including evolving market needs nationwide and within California. It also examined the supply of students to fill new jobs—including a focus on community colleges, an evolving definition of college and career readiness, and pathways that extend across systems to prepare students for workforce access and success. Across conversation topics, meeting participants identified a goal of preparing students for career options that provide financial security and personal fulfillment. Education systems represent not an end in and of themselves, but one critical component of a pathway to such a career.

This summary presents an overview of the presentations and discussions from the meeting. It begins by addressing the demand side of workforce preparation, identifying market trends for what the labor force will require of today’s students. It then turns to the supply side of the equation, examining the role of education systems in preparing students to meet those demands. Next, the summary synthesizes the discussion of defining educational pathways as one means of establishing connections among institutions to enable a seamless progression for students into a career of their choice. Finally, it identifies some cross-cutting themes that emerged across two days of meeting discussion.

## **Market Trends: What Is the Workforce for Which Students Are Preparing?**

The first day began with presentations from John Dorrer of Jobs for the Future (JFF) and Hans Johnson of Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) about evolving job market needs. These needs reflect not only traditional job projections based on historical trends, but analyses of job postings that can identify labor demands in real time.

### ***Premium on Job Skills***

The demands for contemporary jobs emphasize the need for skilled labor. Newly created American jobs increasingly revolve around interactions, exchanges involving complex problem solving, experience, and contextual understanding. Conversely, job losses primarily impact transactional jobs—exchanges that can be scripted, routinized, and/or automated—and jobs focused on converting physical materials into finished goods. Changing patterns of globalization underscore this trend. Unskilled workers who will accept low wages fill a diminishing percentage of available jobs; skilled labor is increasingly in demand. As one example, Johnson described a textile plant that once relied on 300 workers to operate one sewing machine apiece. Due to technological advances, the same plant now relies on a single worker to operate 300 sewing machines, and that single worker requires advanced technical skills.

As a result of the shifting demand for skilled labor, an occupation is becoming an outmoded concept. While careers still exist, they increasingly no longer take the form of a single position (or escalation of positions) within a single organization, but rather consist of a sequence of occupations. Dorrer therefore offered a new definition of career as “a portfolio of skills you acquire and how you’re able to trade on those skills to perform.”

### ***Premium on Credentials***

*National Trends:* In addition to the demand for skilled labor, the changing job market places a premium on credentials. An increasing percentage of jobs require college degrees: 60 percent of jobs in 2007 required at least an associate’s degree, up from 28 percent in 1973, yet only 40 percent of Americans obtain an associate’s or bachelor’s degree by the age of 27. Workers with bachelor’s degrees earn more money than those with lower education levels—a wage gap that continues to increase over time. Likewise, and particularly relevant in the context of a struggling economy, unemployment rates increase as education level drops. Despite this demonstrated need for achieving higher levels of education, the United States has a younger generation that is not earning college degrees at the same rate as the older generation. At the same time, the retirement of the baby boomer cohort will leave a substantial void of skilled labor for the younger generation to fill; indeed, this wave of retirement represents the first time in California, the United States, or the rest of the world with such a sizeable percentage of college-educated people leaving the workforce.

*California Trends:* Job trends in California reflect, and in some cases extend, the trends identified in the country as a whole. PPIC projects that 41 percent of jobs will require a bachelor's degree or more by 2025, but that only 35 percent of California adults will have a bachelor's degree. Under these projections, the state will face a shortfall of 1 million college graduates in 2025. The trends are especially notable in light of the state's demographic trends. Latinos represented nearly 35 percent of working-age adults in 2006, a share that PPIC projects will increase to nearly 45 percent in 2025. However, Latinos are much less likely to earn bachelor's degrees than the population as a whole. While slightly more than 30 percent of all California adults had a bachelor's degree in 2006, only 10 percent of Latino adults did; those numbers project to 35 percent and 15 percent by 2025, respectively. Thus, while degree attainment will continue to rise, it will not keep pace with anticipated job demands, particularly for the fastest growing segment of the workforce.

### ***Challenges to Resolving Supply and Demand Gaps***

The gaps between job needs and levels of college preparation highlight the growing mismatch between the supply of new workers into the labor force and the demands of industry for skilled labor. The California Master Plan<sup>1</sup> creates a system through which all students can enroll in and complete a course of study that results in associate's or bachelor's degree attainment. However, resource constraints that have resulted from the state's fiscal crisis now limit enrollment in key courses and in entire institutions, even for students who have met requirements for course-taking and transfer. This means that even as available jobs increasingly require a college education, many qualified students cannot access the courses and programs they need to earn a degree. Furthermore, courses of study in California's higher education systems do not always align with the job opportunities available after graduation. Thus, even at a time when degree completion becomes increasingly important to open doors in the workforce, many qualified California students do not have the opportunity to complete these degrees.

### ***Reflections on Presentations about Market Trends***

Meeting participants described the information presented as daunting and frustrating, but important. School districts rarely engage in this kind of conversation, but the reality of the job market has important implications for the work of our education system.

While the presentations highlighted the growing importance of college degrees, participants also raised questions about an overemphasis on college in discussions of workforce preparation. The proportional need for a college degree continues to increase, as well as the wage premium associated with the degree, but substantial demand for employees without a college education still exists. Retail salespersons, for example,

---

<sup>1</sup> The California Master Plan for Higher Education of 1960 identifies the specific roles of the University of California (UC), California State University (CSU), and the California community college systems in providing postsecondary education to California students. The plan establishes priority access to UC and CSU schools for top high school graduates, but guarantees enrollment in the community college system for all students and that community college graduates can transfer to UC or CSU to complete their bachelor's degree.

represent an occupation with ongoing high levels of demand. One meeting participant also relayed the story of someone who, in response to a discussion of preparing students for college, urged, “We need people who can smog cars.” In response to these points, meeting participants raised some important considerations. First, most job projection data are cross-sectional and not longitudinal. Many unskilled and/or low-paying jobs are essential in this economy, and do not necessarily represent “bad jobs.” However, while they may represent an appropriate employment option early in life, they may not provide career options that allow for upward mobility and personal fulfillment. Meeting participants emphasized that while some individuals may pursue unskilled labor positions, our public education system has a responsibility to ensure that they have a choice.

Participants also emphasized the need to put meaning into terminology that we often use casually without shared understanding. For example, individuals often use the terms skills, degrees, and certificates interchangeably, when in fact they represent different accomplishments and have different implications for workforce preparedness. Similarly, a distinction between associate’s and bachelor’s degrees when defining college attendance and graduation is important, as they can have different implications for courses of study and for job opportunities. Meeting participants also noted the tendency to speak only in terms of California’s public education system, and spoke of the need to explicitly address the role of private and for-profit institutions in serving students and providing pathways into career opportunities. Still others raised the problem of using terms like career technical education (CTE)—noting the common association of CTE programs with lower-tier academic tracks—noting that *all* education prepares students for careers, either in the short or long term.

### ***A New Framework for Defining College and Career Readiness***

The market trend presentations emphasized an evolving definition of job skills and the increasing importance of postsecondary training. Yet while national reform dialogue often focuses on college and career readiness as the goal of K–12 education, no clear shared understanding exists around the meaning of this term. If our education systems are to effectively prepare students for a new world of work, a clear understanding of what preparedness entails is in order. To this end, ConnectEd has led an effort to develop a consensus definition of college and career readiness. The Collaborative meeting gave participants an opportunity to explore and reflect on this emerging framework.

The College and Career Readiness Framework expands beyond academic content to stipulate that students need a variety of knowledge; skills; dispositions and behaviors; and educational, career, and civic engagement abilities to succeed in their postsecondary endeavors. The framework also delineates three domains of academic, 21<sup>st</sup> century, and career and technical knowledge and skills in which students must develop competency.

Meeting participants expressed appreciation for the framework’s emphasis on the connection between school and the world, and the demonstration to youth of why the skills they’re learning are important. Taken together, the elements of the framework speak to the “portfolio of skills” necessary for career success. Participants also noted how much of the

framework is absent from the typical college readiness discussion, and from what schools currently do. Reactions also identified potential challenges associated with the framework. One individual cautioned against being too prescriptive about skills needed for the workforce, noting, “The definition of markets is that they are fluid. It guarantees that you cannot predict them.” The framework, while it identifies skills that can serve students in a variety of professions, may also risk being additive in a way that identifies more “stuff” to teach kids. Another participant noted that the more global approach espoused in this framework is likely to encounter push-back from educators with content ties, as core subject-area content knowledge becomes just one of a broader set of attributes that students must develop.

### **Career Supply: How Can Students Access the Preparation They Need for Postsecondary Success?**

Having raised considerations about labor needs and the skills students require to fill contemporary jobs, the conversation then focused on the systems in which individuals develop the skills and acquire the credentials they need for their career of choice. K–12 education plays an essential role in this process, and because districts send students on to other systems, those systems need to understand one another to best fulfill this role.

After high school graduation, California’s system of higher education features a range of postsecondary options to prepare students for the workforce. However, the lack of alignment among them is striking. The state has seven systems of higher education—ranging from public to private to for-profit institutions—and no coordinating mechanism for any of them. In addition, while community colleges promise open access to all students, one participant commented that students who do not complete California’s A–G graduation requirements often become an afterthought, and that no clear postsecondary pathway exists for them. Thus, in a conversation about college and career readiness, the passage through college to a career can take many paths—many of which may be dysfunctional in their current state.

Meeting dialogue addressed the respective roles for K–12 and higher education systems, and the pressing need for greater alignment.

#### ***Examining the Role of California Community Colleges***

Community colleges received particular attention during the meeting as a key bridge for students between K–12 and both higher levels of education and the workforce. Because they are designed to serve any of the state’s high school graduates who wish to attend, community colleges enroll the majority of the state’s undergraduates; headcounts from fall 2009 demonstrate that they also serve a larger percentage of Latino, Black, Native American, and part-time students than the University of California (UC) or California State University (CSU) systems. Many community college programs provide direct job training—including many with a CTE focus. In fact, the community college system, by design, is often more responsive to the local business community than the UC or CSU systems. In addition,

the system plays an important transfer function, enabling students to complete preliminary coursework before moving on to a UC or CSU campus to complete a bachelor's degree.

A presentation by Nancy Shulock of the Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy highlighted research findings about the community college context and challenges to program completion. California's community college system is highly decentralized, with 112 colleges in 72 independent districts and a state chancellor that has limited authority over the institutions. Despite a vision of open access to a community college education, Shulock called out weaknesses in the system's ability to pass students on to degree completion. Six years after enrolling, only 40 percent of degree-seeking students had completed one year of college credits, and 69 percent had failed to earn a certificate, earn an associate's degree, or transfer to another school. Furthermore, while some enrollment patterns correlate highly with student success, few students follow them. For example, 61 percent of degree-seekers who passed college math within two years completed a certificate or degree or transferred (compared to 22 percent of those who did not pass college math within two years), yet only 29 percent of students completed this milestone. Even for students who transfer, only half have completed 60 units prior to transferring.

Shulock drew on recent recommendations from the California Community Colleges Student Success Task Force to identify contextual factors in the community college system that contribute to these figures. As a system designed to serve "the top 100 percent" of high school graduates, a focus on access has often trumped a focus on completion. Additional loose guidelines—including a lack of mandatory orientation, the ability for students to delay remedial work, and failure of eligible students to apply for financial aid—have contributed to a system without a strong structure for guiding students to completion. On top of these factors, increasing budget cuts have resulted in eliminating course offerings, limiting course enrollments, and preventing transfer to CSU schools, all of which increase the degree of difficulty for students to achieve program completion. Even when students do earn their certificate or degree, the Task Force's report suggests that these credentials may not align well with career opportunities—a problem that becomes magnified if the programs do not build the portfolio of skills students will need for career flexibility.

A panel of community college leaders reacted to these findings, and shared some existing programs designed to strengthen the vertical connections for students that enable seamless movement through their educational experience to the workforce. Community colleges often establish strong relationships with local employers, sometimes even co-developing training courses and programs as part of a job pipeline. In addition to reaching up to the job market, some community colleges also reach down to establish connections with K–12 systems. Early college high schools can give students opportunities to gain exposure to and complete college coursework while still in high school. Early registration programs for high school students, as well as priority registration agreements in Long Beach, Sacramento, and San Francisco, can also ease the transition for high school students directly into college.

Nevertheless, gaps exist between K–12 districts and community colleges that contribute to the challenge of program completion, including a high need for remedial coursework

among entering students. As a means of combating the trend of haphazard course completion, one panelist suggested that all high school graduates be required to develop a postsecondary plan prior to leaving high school.

### ***Examining the Role of K-12 School Districts***

As the role of education systems in workforce preparation received attention throughout the meeting, conversation routinely turned to the role of K-12 public education—both in developing skills for a new workforce and in equipping students for a seamless transition to degree/credential attainment after high school. While discussions of college and career readiness frequently focus on high school and postsecondary opportunities, district leaders in the room emphasized that career readiness begins in elementary school. First and foremost, students who have not mastered basic skills and who become disengaged from and drop out of school will struggle to develop the tools they need to progress to a successful career. In addition, the skills and dispositions described in the College and Career Readiness Framework must be introduced and developed throughout the educational process, not merely added as part of a new program late in a student's academic career.

Given the importance of K-12 education in student preparation, meeting participants emphasized the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as a tool for improving learning opportunities. Returning to the notion that 21<sup>st</sup> century careers will require a portfolio of skills, one individual remarked that a "portfolio of skills will not be developed without a great deal of attention to the way the Common Core is going to be implemented." The CCSS provide an opportunity to develop deeper levels of content understanding and skills that were designed to meet a definition of college and career readiness.

While CCSS implementation offers opportunity, meeting participants also identified significant challenges. The new standards introduce new expectations for instruction for teachers trained and accustomed to teaching in a different way. One individual observed, "Not only is the content incredibly new, but how to teach it is so incredibly foreign to a lot of our teachers." To that end, districts face the immediate need to effectively roll out the CCSS in a way that facilitates the deep levels of understanding that teachers need. Underscoring the tremendous challenge of teacher development that this entails, one participant asserted, "If you haven't started implementing the Common Core now, it's too late."

While the CCSS provide an important tool for improving instructional quality, districts must move beyond these academic standards if they wish to develop the skills students need for college and career success. Referring back to the College and Career Readiness Framework, meeting participants suggested that while the CCSS encompass the academic knowledge and skills fairly inclusively, they may be less comprehensive in the career and 21<sup>st</sup> century domains—and speak hardly at all to the areas of productive dispositions and behaviors and educational, career, and civic engagement.

In addition, while CCSS developers explicitly set out to build to a goal of college and career readiness, the standards have limitations in acknowledging and establishing appropriate learning needs for CTE programs. These needs also have implications for teachers. If we hope for teachers to develop the skills students need, they must understand what those are. This includes not only an understanding of students' postsecondary options—and the steps needed to access those options—but of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions students will need to thrive in their postsecondary endeavors.

Meeting participants also raised the importance of communicating to students about their postsecondary options. Several noted not only that education systems have a limited understanding of the job market trends facing students after high school and college, but that students quite rarely know or understand the reality or the implications for their own education. Explicit articulation of what students need and how they will use it—both in terms of skills and credentials—represents an important step in giving students agency to successfully pursue their own workforce ambitions. School districts may wish to communicate more thoroughly with students and families early in their academic career about precisely what they need to accomplish by high school graduation in order to stay on track. Once again, conversation highlighted the importance of teachers understanding both the job opportunities available to students and the skills students need to access them.

### ***Moving Beyond Institutions to Build Vertical Alignment***

Despite the promise of some existing programs and new opportunities, conversation highlighted the challenge of achieving alignment across systems around agendas of completion and equity. Meeting participants emphasized the importance of framing conversations around outcomes, not merely around access. This orientation to the challenge of workforce preparation will require much greater alignment than currently exists. Horizontal alignment—characterized, for example, by consistent criteria to determine the need for remediation or by consistent program requirements for a given associate's degree—can ensure equitable education opportunities for students within a given education system. Vertical alignment—characterized, for example, by mutual agreement about the skills students need to access college coursework and the skills they develop prior to high school graduation—can enable students' steady progression through the levels of their educational career to successful degree or certificate completion. Finally, given that job opportunities tend to exist regionally, and not according to the jurisdiction of specific schools or educational systems, regional alignment can facilitate opportunities that give students preparation for the jobs available to them after they complete their schooling.

In pursuing greater alignment across institutions, many participants emphasized the challenge of individuals' and systems' tendencies to protect their own turf. Describing this problem, one participant used the analogy of designing a master schedule. When creating a master schedule that best meets student needs, educators frequently encounter resistance from individuals who wish to protect positions within their departments or traditional space and scheduling arrangements. Resulting conversations frequently get sidetracked by adults preserving their own needs at the expense of student needs.



Several meeting participants noted that the analogy applies across systems as well, and that the trend may be even more prevalent in a context of limited resources. Describing the challenge, one participant noted that we have been conditioned to think in institution-centered terms rather than student-centered terms, and raised questions about the viability of reorienting the conversation, asserting, “I don’t see how you in institutions can work within yourselves to reinvent yourselves.” Another participant noted that the meeting’s focus on community colleges as a discrete entity highlights the lack of a seamless workforce preparation system. “If we were talking about pathways [to careers],” he observed, “we wouldn’t have a separate panel on community colleges.”

The partnerships referenced during the community college panel represent one way to reinforce the connections for students between high school and postsecondary education. In Long Beach Unified School District (USD), 65 percent of graduates go on to attend Long Beach Community College or CSU Long Beach; the “Long Beach College Promise” guarantees enrollment for qualified students in both institutions. Sacramento City USD, where 80 percent of graduates attend Community College of Sacramento or CSU Sacramento, is working to develop a similar relationship. This kind of vertical alignment can help prevent students from falling through the cracks at important transition points during their path through postsecondary education to the workforce.

## **Pathways as a Means of Strengthening Vertical Alignment**

As students look to bridge traditionally discrete phases in educational and workforce preparation, pathways that extend from college to the workforce may better connect opportunities across systems to ensure successful preparation for and access to good jobs. This approach to connecting education and the workforce builds on Linked Learning approaches underway in multiple Collaborative districts, which served as the focus of our November 2011 meeting in Long Beach. On the meeting’s second day, meeting participants explored the Pathways to Prosperity initiative and its efforts to create this kind of seamless trajectory for students.

### ***Pathways to Prosperity Initiative***

Nancy Hoffman of JFF and Bob Schwartz of the Harvard Graduate School of Education joined the meeting to speak about the Pathways to Prosperity Initiative, which promotes the creation of pathways that link learning to the job market and align to current and projected market demand. The project began with the February 2011 report *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, and draws on lessons from European systems that create pathways from education to career through partnerships between the education and business communities. Rather than provide specific recommendations, the report focuses on three broad themes. First, the report finds that the American system lacks the European focus on helping young people transition from school to work, which reflects a broader social compact between adult society and the younger generation that we do not find in this country—the lack of which creates a barrier to creating meaningful partnerships. Thus, the second emphasis is to

identify a strategy that enables employers to act in their own self-interest, not just on goodwill, in becoming partners in quality pathway development. This point leads to the final focus, a concentrated effort to build pathways for students to prepare for, enter, and succeed in the workforce. This final point drives the Initiative's current effort to partner with states to develop work plans for developing effective pathways; California is a potential partner in these efforts.

### ***Reflections on Pathways***

A panel of leaders from school districts, community colleges, and the business community engaged in a conversation to explore the ideas behind the Pathways Initiative. One tension cited during the conversation exists between an education system looking for more workforce connections and businesses that find it difficult to work effectively within the education system. One business representative explained a frustration with education systems that leads industry to prepare employees independently rather than through collaboration: "We don't feel like the [education] system is flexible in meeting our needs. Instead of being involved in the system, we do it on the back end. Being involved on the front end of the system is difficult." Conversation suggested that a willingness to learn and speak one another's language, and to revisit traditional means of operating, may be necessary for these partnerships to thrive.

The panelists also reacted positively to the *Pathways* report's notion that from a perspective of economic competitiveness, the region provides a more appropriate lens than an individual system. This conversation reflected earlier observations during the meeting that individuals too often face the challenges from an institutional perspective rather than from a perspective of student and workforce needs and outcomes. Again echoing themes from earlier in the meeting, the panel articulated an aspiration for a level of alignment that can break down many of the traditional silos and serve mutual goals of student preparation for workforce needs.

Opening the panel discussion to a larger conversation, meeting participants highlighted the opportunity for more broadly conceived pathways to build on the strengths of existing secondary programs (including Linked Learning or early college high schools) by extending them to certificate and degree completion and workforce entry. However, educators must also confront the challenge of ensuring quality across business connections. Business partners may have varying levels of interest in engaging (and training to effectively engage) students in meaningful workforce activities, and quality could be a casualty of expanding business connections too far.

Virtual opportunities, where students share information electronically through video and other learning approaches, can help achieve multiple goals. They can connect rural communities with business opportunities that may not exist locally. They can also ensure quality in urban communities, enabling a large number of students to access a limited number of high quality resources without requiring the recruitment of additional partners that may not be sufficiently prepared for a high quality relationship. Finally, technology offers an opportunity for cost savings as participants from education and business can

engage in work together without incurring travel costs or excessive time away from school or the workplace.

As noted later in this summary, concerns about equity emerged throughout the meeting. For pathway construction in particular, tracking emerged as one threat; some participants raised concerns about the dangers of tracking students into pathways towards different outcomes based on preconceived notions of students' ability levels. Indeed, this issue had previously emerged as a consideration in Linked Learning pathway design during the Collaborative's Long Beach meeting. In this discussion, others emphasized the need to acknowledge that students are already tracked by default in the existing California education system—for example, through course-taking patterns that disproportionately deny opportunity to students of color. Nevertheless, educators must remain vigilant throughout K–12 schooling to ensure equitable opportunities for all students.

Meeting participants also suggested that value may exist in shifting the conversation about the goal of student preparation. In dialogue around college and career readiness, we often position college as an end to itself. As one individual articulated, "We've constructed a message that college is the destination. Our argument is that four-year college is a pathway to one set of careers." In that vein, another participant reflected that "college ready" may not be an appropriate measure at all. Rather, all education systems are designed to produce career-ready students, and different careers require different paths—the degree to which college plays a role in those paths will vary. Indeed, paths may resemble a moving sidewalk that individuals can enter or exit at various points in time to engage in different work endeavors or to move on to the next stage of a career. College may not be the end goal, but rather part of the path to enabling students access to their career of choice.

## **Cross-Cutting Considerations**

Throughout the two-day meeting, several themes emerged about efforts to better prepare students for today's workforce.

### ***Conversation Must Become Student Centered***

Throughout the meeting, participants emphasized the need to shift to a conversation that focuses on students and outcomes. As one individual observed, "I'm really tired of the national education reform conversation dominated by accountability and teacher effectiveness. This is a student-centered agenda." This perspective shifts the typical conversation about the purpose of school districts to a more broadly conceived vision of healthy cities and quality of life. While the need to transcend traditional concepts of where this work takes place presents a daunting challenge, shifting to a student-centered conversation can foster the creation of bridges across traditionally siloed institutions, and enable the alignment identified as critical to our collective success.

## ***California's Education System Is Antiquated***

The growing understanding among meeting participants of evolving workforce needs and public education's ability to meet them led many to the conclusion that the California system is ill-equipped to address these challenges. The California Master Plan emerged in 1960, and the system around it reflects a certain time and set of expectations—an environment in which productive careers were widely available to students without a college education.

Course requirements likewise do not reflect the skill demands for contemporary jobs. As one example, a focus on Algebra II over statistics as an A–G requirement does not necessarily reflect the math demands of today's workforce. Furthermore, the lack of coordination between and among systems poorly reflects the mobility of today's society. While we might expect young people to attend multiple institutions in the pursuit of a credential or degree, the lack of coordination unnecessarily introduces obstacles to successful completion. Meeting conversation—including recommendations from the California Community Colleges Student Success Task Force—suggested that the state could play an important coordinating role in addressing these challenges. However, the current state environment and lack of alignment across institutions may mean that immediate action is most appropriate at the local level.

## ***Data Tools Can Facilitate System Improvement***

School systems rarely access or use information about what their students need after graduation. In comparison to private industry, education systems spend only a fraction of their resources on market research. However, sophisticated data tools can enable more responsiveness to the job market. Moving beyond job projections based solely on historical trends, Dorrer shared efforts by JFF to analyze job postings to identify the positions in most demand in real time. Further examination of résumés in these online job posting systems can identify the prior experience of successful applicants to reveal the skills actually required for given lines of work. In addition, regional analyses that examine the specific numbers of students being prepared for different jobs can provide an important foundation for efforts to align postsecondary programs with local employer needs.

Producing and sharing this information across systems can support efforts to increase alignment. One community college leader suggested that current data reporting requirements do not accurately reflect program success; a certificate that requires fewer than 12 units is not currently classified as college completion, and a failure to track completion for students returning from the workforce may lead to misleading counts. Improved accuracy can inform students, K–12 educators, and business leaders as they seek to develop pathways to a successful career. Disaggregating information can also inform systems seeking to serve the goal of equity while expanding opportunity. Data sharing can also serve the broader goals of community building in service of individual opportunity. In Oakland, data sharing agreements with the local housing authority and social service agencies enable a more comprehensive understanding of each student's challenges and can facilitate the provision of supports that increase opportunity for at-risk youth.

## ***Attentiveness to Equity Must Accompany Improvement Efforts***

Throughout the meeting, participants continually raised the challenges of equity in conversations of workforce preparation. This awareness must feed the development of and access to pathways for all students rather than simply create a new system of tracking. In addition, the current fiscal environment has limited resources and fewer enrollment opportunities in the state's public education systems. As a result, approaches that pursue alignment between K–12 systems and higher education around a completion agenda may also cut off opportunities for some students. For example, the priority enrollment programs in Long Beach and Sacramento, while ensuring space for students in those programs, may mean lost opportunities for students from other districts. Focus on community college access for students progressing directly from high school may limit access for dropouts and individuals returning to college from the workforce. Equity must remain a persistently driving objective for educators and business leaders, but the answers to ensuring equity may not always be clear or easy to achieve.

## **Next Steps for the Collaborative**

Before concluding the meeting, members briefly discussed growing statewide interest in transitioning to a weighted student funding formula. Meeting participants expressed interest in the emerging proposals, but emphasized the importance of pursuing any potential changes thoughtfully and with appropriate attention to detail that can ensure successful implementation. Collaborative district leaders will follow up on this conversation with a conference call to discuss whether and how the Collaborative may wish to voice an opinion on this issue.

In the meantime, Collaborative staff continue to pursue opportunities to deepen the work of previous core meetings. The fourth and final brief documenting the Fresno-Long Beach Learning Partnership will be released in May; a related article that explores different kinds of district partnerships and learning opportunities is in the early stages of development. In addition, Collaborative staff are currently conducting interviews for a brief that will identify lessons from previous state efforts to administer performance-based tasks as part of standards-aligned assessments; this brief can inform district efforts as they tackle the challenge of student assessment under the CCSS. Finally, an emerging partnership between Garden Grove USD and Oakland USD seeks to establish an opportunity for inter-district learning about a holistic approach to human capital development. Collaborative staff are supporting and documenting this work.

The next Collaborative meeting will return to our traditional focus on a problem of practice by focusing on the issue of leadership development in Fresno USD. For ongoing information about the Collaborative, resources from this and previous meetings, updates about Collaborative members, and information on upcoming events, please visit our website at [www.cacollaborative.org](http://www.cacollaborative.org).