



# California needs to ramp up college education, study finds

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A new report estimates that California will have a shortage of 1 million college graduates by 2025. The report by the [Public Policy Institute of California](#) suggests that employers would have to move jobs outside the state to find qualified workers, or bring in employees from out of state to fill positions here.

The problem, according to the institute, is that population growth has outpaced the expansion of state schools, leaving students with limited options for college. With many highly-educated older Californians from the Baby Boomer generation set to retire, the demand for jobs requiring higher education are bound to increase, according to the institute.

While 1 million may seem like a large number, Lisa Loop, co-director of the Teacher Education Program at Claremont Graduate University said it isn't ridiculous.

"We have a shortage of college graduates in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math," she said. "In the past math and science were thought as subjects for the talented and elite and so we have a large scare of failures in these areas, but I believe everyone can learn math and science."

Loop said colleges are missing that whole group of individuals and that problem starts at the public education level and moves into the bachelor level.

To remedy the situation, Loop said Claremont McKenna College is working with public schools to recruit a wider pool of STEM candidates and even trying to change the way they instruct at the bachelor level.

"There is a lot of exciting work done in these areas, and we need a different type of worker now than 15 years ago," she said. "The question is how much head way we can make in the next 10-15 years so that number (of 1 million) is not correct."

In the Inland Empire, more than half of the adult population has never taken a single college class, said Albert Karnig, Cal State San Bernardino's president.

"Only one third of our high school graduates go to college," Karnig said.

Craig Petinak, spokesman for San Bernardino Valley College said getting students at a high school level onto college campuses before their senior year is crucial to the growth of college graduates.

"By doing that, the student has a sense of accountability and it becomes a part of their life," he said.

Petinak said the college is focusing on the promotion of transfers, producing graduates, the local financial impact, current enrollment numbers to contribute to closing the gap.

California has a lot of demand in high-tech industries. Engineering, movie production and other technical positions will be in particular demand, said Jack Kyser chief economist of Los Angeles Economic Development Corp.

"The aerospace industry, in particular, is going to have a lot of Baby Boomers retiring," said Kyser. "In the longer term, we've got to be concerned with the low number of students in those fields."

Kyser added there also will be increased demand for medical technician jobs and possibly for skilled workers in green energy or other new technology jobs that could be created in the following decade or so.

With the recession, he said, firms are not looking to add new skilled graduates. In the long term, however, with economic recovery, a shortage is likely.

Those with bachelor's degree have a potential to have substantially higher earnings than those with just a high school diploma, Karnig said. That in turn can help the local economy.

"If you make more money, you spend more money, and when you spend more money you help create jobs for other people," Karnig said.

The easiest solution, said Hans Johnson of the PPIC, is for the state to give more people financial aid to get them into school and keep them there.

Specifically, Johnson said, the state needs to work on getting more students to college.

The report suggests increasing the college attendance rate from 56 percent to 61 percent, and improving the transfer rate from community colleges, while also working to hike the California State University system graduate rate. Those goals would fix about half of the shortage, but would still leave the state 500,000 graduates short.

"We've identified some less expensive goals that the state can achieve even with the current budget problems," said Johnson.

Karnig agreed.

"The last thing we want to do now is to reduce access," he said. "And it's the only thing you can do during the hard times."

A growing immigrant population also has changed the outlook on education, said Johnson.

"First-generation Latino immigrants often come to the U.S. with very little education," said Johnson. "Even in the second-generation, you see higher education attendance rates are a lot lower."

California has gone from being one of the top states in secondary education to being in the middle of the pack, according to the report. In 1960, the state ranked eighth in the percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds with a college degree nationwide.

By 2006, it had fallen to 23rd.

Those changes, Johnson said, indicate not that the state has less educated people than it used to, but rather that it has not increased its population of college graduates as fast as other states.

The basic problems facing the schools are two-fold, said Johnson. First, not all students are academically prepared to enter college.

Students accepted at Cal State San Bernardino fall into the upper one third of their graduating class, said Jim Mulvihill, professor emeritus of urban planning at the university.

"Two thirds of them can't pass basic English or math classes," Mulvihill said.

A lot of students have problems coming up with enough money to pay their way through college. But the money is available, Karnig said, in form of grants and other financial aid.

"About 57 percent of our students don't pay any fees at all," Karnig said.

The government should offer more money to students with good grades, report suggests.

The University of California and California State University systems, which often serve students with a higher income than those in community college, could also consider raising their fees for those families who can afford the school, while offering more aid to students who can't, said Johnson.

"Right now those schools are considered very strong academic choices, but still have very low tuition rates," said Johnson. "A lot of students who attend the UCs can afford to pay higher than the rate that is offered, while a lot of other students can't afford to attend."

Finally, the report recommends opening up more community college classes to high school students – giving them a chance to get early experience in what will be required of them when they attend the schools.

That idea is echoed by Assemblyman Anthony Portantino, D-La Cañada Flintridge, the head of the Assembly's education committee. He has introduced a bill that removes a rule that limits the number of students who can attend community college early.

"Years ago there were fiscal abuses where high school students were enrolled in phantom classes that weren't actually being taught," said Portantino. "But the legislature overreacted and put in rules that put in bureaucratic red tape that is keeping kids from getting a chance to attend these classes early."

Portantino also has another bill that would create a higher education commission that would set binding goals for the state school system.

Nevertheless, Portantino and Johnson both concede that without finding more funding for the public secondary schools, the state will fall short of its goals. The current budget situation has caused the CSU system to cut the number of students it is admitting.

The state also will need to improve the performance of its high schools to see improvement in college graduation rates, Portantino said.

"We're doing the best that we can with a terrible budget situation," said Portantino. "But ultimately we can't get where we need to be without more education expenditures."