



State of California

LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION

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Commission Calls for Focus on Student Outcomes at Community Colleges

The Little Hoover Commission on Tuesday urged the Governor and the Legislature to refocus the mission of the community colleges to align policies and resources around fostering student achievement in three core areas: basic skills education, career technical education and preparation for transfer to four-year universities. The Commission also called for the state to consolidate responsibility and funding for California's adult education programs within the community college system to maintain educational options for all levels of adult learners.

In its report, *Serving Students, Serving California: Updating the California Community Colleges to Meet Evolving Demands*, the Commission found that the community colleges have opened doors to people who want to improve the quality of their lives by earning more income, building skills to run a business, excelling in careers, being better parents, or taking another chance to realize their dreams and fulfill their potential. Yet, the Commission found that in trying to be all things to everyone, community colleges are coming up short for many.

In this study, the Commission found that the state lacks a clear, uniform set of goals for its community college system and campuses. Too many students leave without accomplishing what they set out to achieve, whether learning new job skills or completing a certificate or degree program. Too many are unprepared for college-level work and do not receive adequate guidance to help them make up their educational deficits. At the same time, many students are hobbled in their progress by system policies that encourage campuses to increase enrollment at the expense of the services and supports that can help students move through the system and on with their lives. The result is that community colleges are rationing access, but not in a rational way, putting students on waiting lists who are prepared to succeed at college-level work. In making its recommendations, the Commission envisions a system that asks more of students, but asks more of colleges as well in supporting students and helping them move up and out of the system.

"California's community colleges hold so much promise, but are limited by the way the system is funded, by the design of the leadership structure, by outdated practices for setting policy and goals," Little Hoover Commission Chairman Daniel Hancock said. "The colleges are in an ideal position to help those who want to improve their lives, and through their success, better meet the state's workforce needs – now and in the future."

"Making strategic changes to the leadership and funding of California's community colleges, as well as to the measures used to guide students, can position the colleges to help close this gap and help ensure the system continues to provide an open door for those who want to better their lives," Chairman Hancock said.

In the report, the Commission's recommendations align with those made recently by the Student Success Task Force, but go further in certain areas:

The state should make student success in three areas its primary goal for community colleges. These areas are: basic skills education, career technical education and preparation for transfer to four-year institutions.

The system should build policies around supporting these goals by requiring students to participate in activities that have been shown to bolster student success, such as required orientation and skills assessment. Students should be given enrollment priority based on whether they have completed an education plan, whether that plan is built around learning a single focused skill need to advance in their career, or to earn a certificate or degree. Priority also should be given to returning students who demonstrate progress toward their goals and those returning to school to renew job skills. Colleges should encourage students to stay committed to their goals by capping the number of credits that can be taken at state-subsidized tuition rates, by linking eligibility for fee waivers to maintaining a minimum grade point average, and by charging the full cost of a course to students who enroll solely for personal enrichment.

The state should update the community college system governance structure by giving more authority and independence to the Office of the Chancellor to develop strategies and incentives that can drive student and college performance.

The chancellor's office should be moved out of the executive branch of state government and established as a separate entity that can establish policy directives, create accountability measures, direct funding, oversee community college districts, and, when necessary, intervene in district affairs. Districts should be given more flexibility in how they deploy resources, while being held accountable for results, and given more freedom to coordinate regionally.

The state should allocate funding in predictable and appropriate ways to encourage student success, and focus spending in ways that facilitate students' success, such as creating incentives for improved student outcomes. The state must amend the funding formula so that it rewards student progress and achievement. The formula must reward colleges whose students attain milestones known to lead to success, or whose students achieve certain basic skills goals or earn certificates or degrees. Further, colleges should be given more flexibility in spending, so they may allocate more money to the kinds of counseling services that help students develop educational plans and make progress.

The state should shift all adult basic education programs and related funding to community colleges. Responsibility for Adult School programs currently operated by K-12 school districts should be shifted to the community college system to stem the erosion of the state's capacity to serve the adults who need these programs. Money previously allocated for these programs through categorical funding should be transferred as well to community college districts to support these programs. Community colleges have a direct stake in the success of these adult learners and, as the examples of the community college-directed adult programs in San Francisco and San Diego have shown, many of these students can go on to success in college-level coursework.

The Little Hoover Commission is a bipartisan and independent state agency charged with recommending ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of state programs. The Commission's recommendations are submitted to the Governor and the Legislature for their consideration and action. For a copy of the report, visit the Commission's Web site: www.lhc.ca.gov.